

punk planet

ISSUE #67 | MAY AND JUNE 2005 | \$4.95 US
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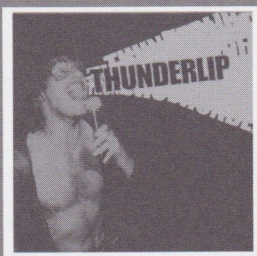
notes from underground

THE ART OF: CAT CHOW | ANDY MUELLER | TARA MCPHERSON | JACOB BANNON | CHRISTA DONNER



ART DESIGN 3

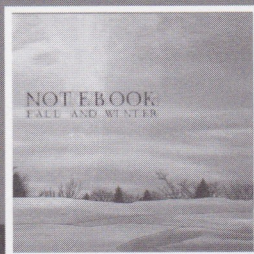




THUNDERLIP
s/t CD

This band has stickers that say "THUNDERLIP - we put the cock back in rock". They're not kidding... from their spandex wearing sweaty shirtless lead singer that sings like Ian Svenonius (of Nation of Ulysses) would if he fronted a cock rock band in the 80's. Complete with killer sing-along songs like 'Meat the Snake'... 'Damnation'... 'Fire in the Hole'... Every song makes you want to pump your fist in the air and imagine you were back at a Black Flag or Minor Threat show in the early 80's. Not that they sound like Black Flag, or Minor Threat - but they have that same RAW energy that made those bands have a KILLER live show. and I MEAN KILLER

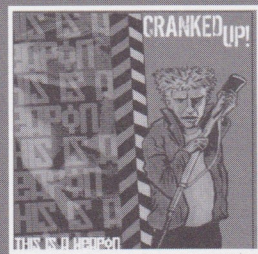
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S/T CD

"Stoner Pop" has never existed quite like the mind-blowing debut release from Miami, Florida's TORCHE. It was hinted at by the singer/songwriter Steve Brooks' former group Floor, founded by the mighty Black Sabbath and nearly accomplished by mainstreamers Queens of the Stone Age... but truly anthemic, triumphant and absolutely massive heavy metal has never been so damn catchy!

Robotic Empire

TWENTYINCHBURIAL

How Much Will We Laugh And Smile CD

Hot of the heels of their split with With Resistance, Twentyinchburial is back to woo American audiences with their new full length showcasing their brand of positive melodic hardcore/metal.

Immigrant Sun

BLOODLINED CALLIGRAPHY
They Want You Silent CD

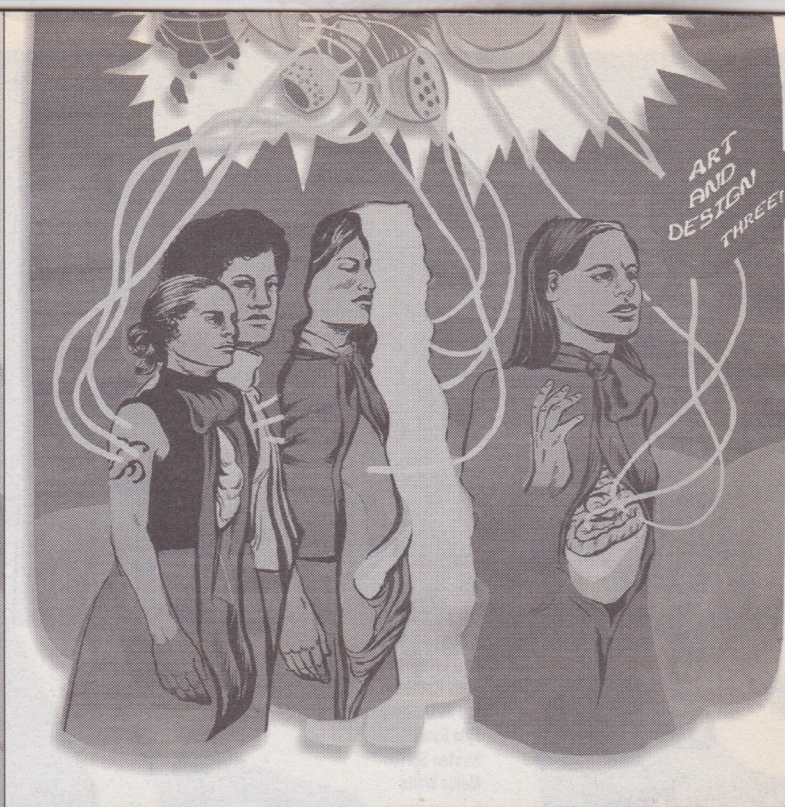
"They Want You Silent" is the debut full length from the female fronted assault of Bloodlined Calligraphy. Vocalist Ally French can hold her own against any other vocalist in the scene (male or female) and the music is well written and executed with a combination of metal and straight forward hardcore without going over the top with either genre.

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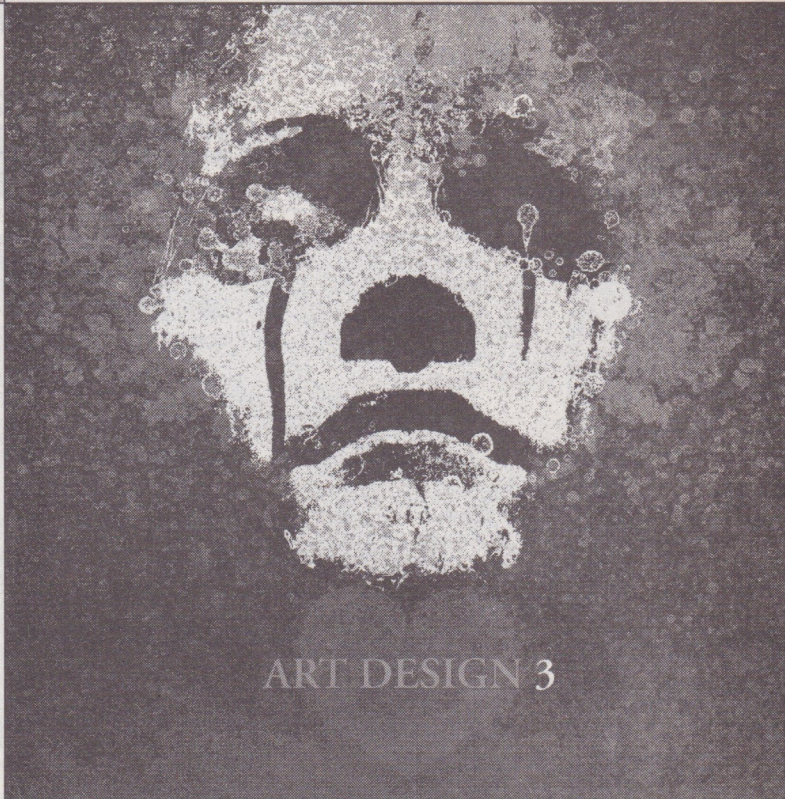
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Artwork on this page is from the three limited-edition covers for Art & Design Three. Artists (clockwise, l-r): Tara McPherson, Christa Donner, Jacob Bannon.

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book reviews

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call for pricing/availability on inside front & back covers.

Ads are due June 6 for PP69

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the risks

intro67

It was seven years ago—four years into our nascent existence—that we published our first Art & Design themed issue. Back then, we were taking a pretty big gamble by dedicating an entire issue to the art of the underground. People had come to expect music coverage from punk zines, and to throw a curve ball like that issue just a few years into *Punk Planet's* life was a risk. It was a risk that paid off, however, as letters and e-mails flowed in from people excited to see a magazine that eschewed the all-bands-all-the-time status quo to focus on some of the other amazing work coming out of this culture.

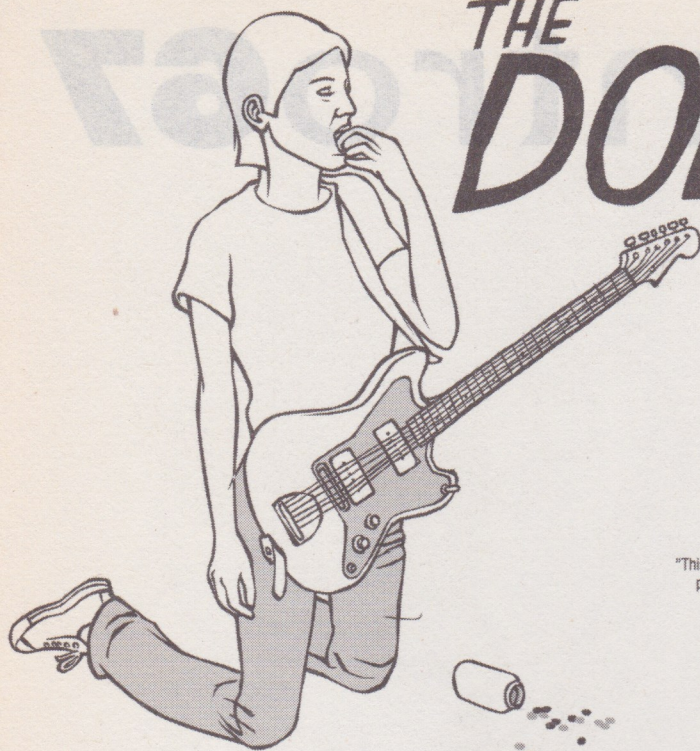
Since that issue, we've incorporated a much wider scope of cultural coverage in the pages of *Punk Planet*, and the underground has also become more inclusive of art forms other than music. But it's still a nice change of pace to dedicate an entire issue to art every now and then. And so it is that I'm proud to introduce the latest in our Art & Design series: Art & Design Three.

This issue picks up where the previous two left off, by documenting some of the best artists and designers in the underground (or anywhere, for that matter). But this issue also pushes into new areas as well, covering fashion design, tattoo art, mapmaking, and even someone who uses love as an art form. It's an eclectic mix full of amazing things to look at—and interesting stories to read. It's been a true pleasure putting it together; I hope you enjoy it.

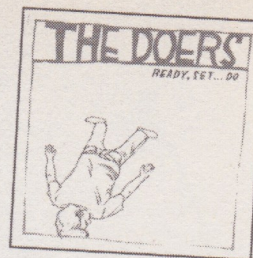
I'm also excited to announce the third book from Punk Planet Books is now available. *Lessons in Taxidermy*, by Bee Laverder, is a moving, yet darkly comic, true-life tale of struggles with illness and poverty and finding the strength to overcome it all. It's an unforgettable story, and one I'm especially glad to help tell.

See you next issue,

DAN



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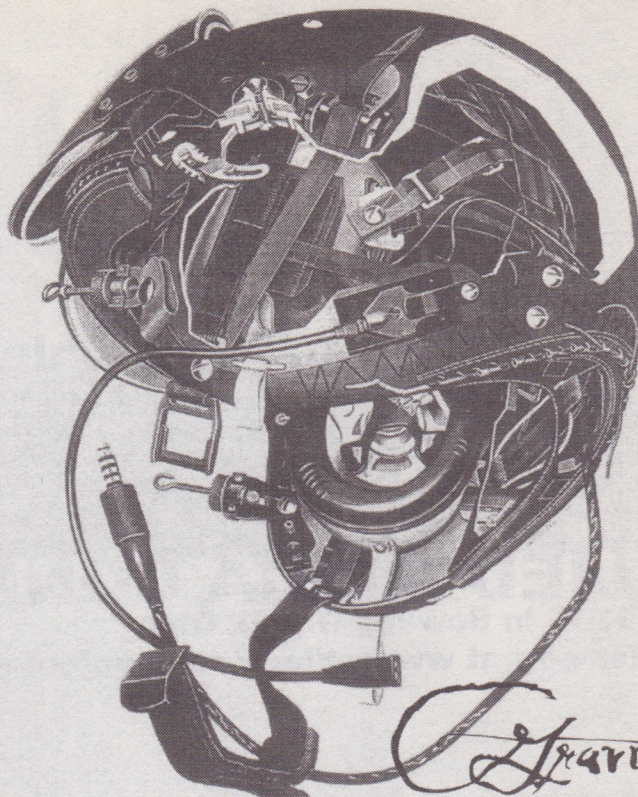


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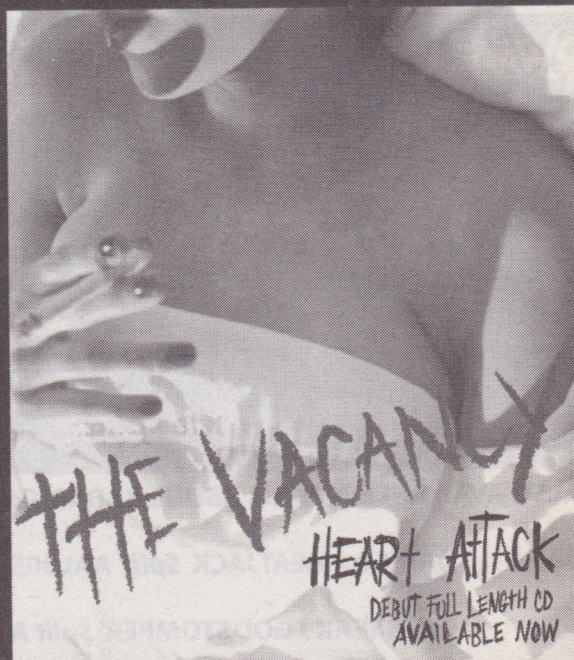
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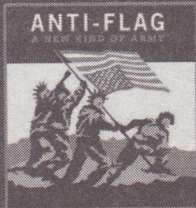
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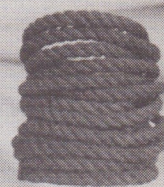
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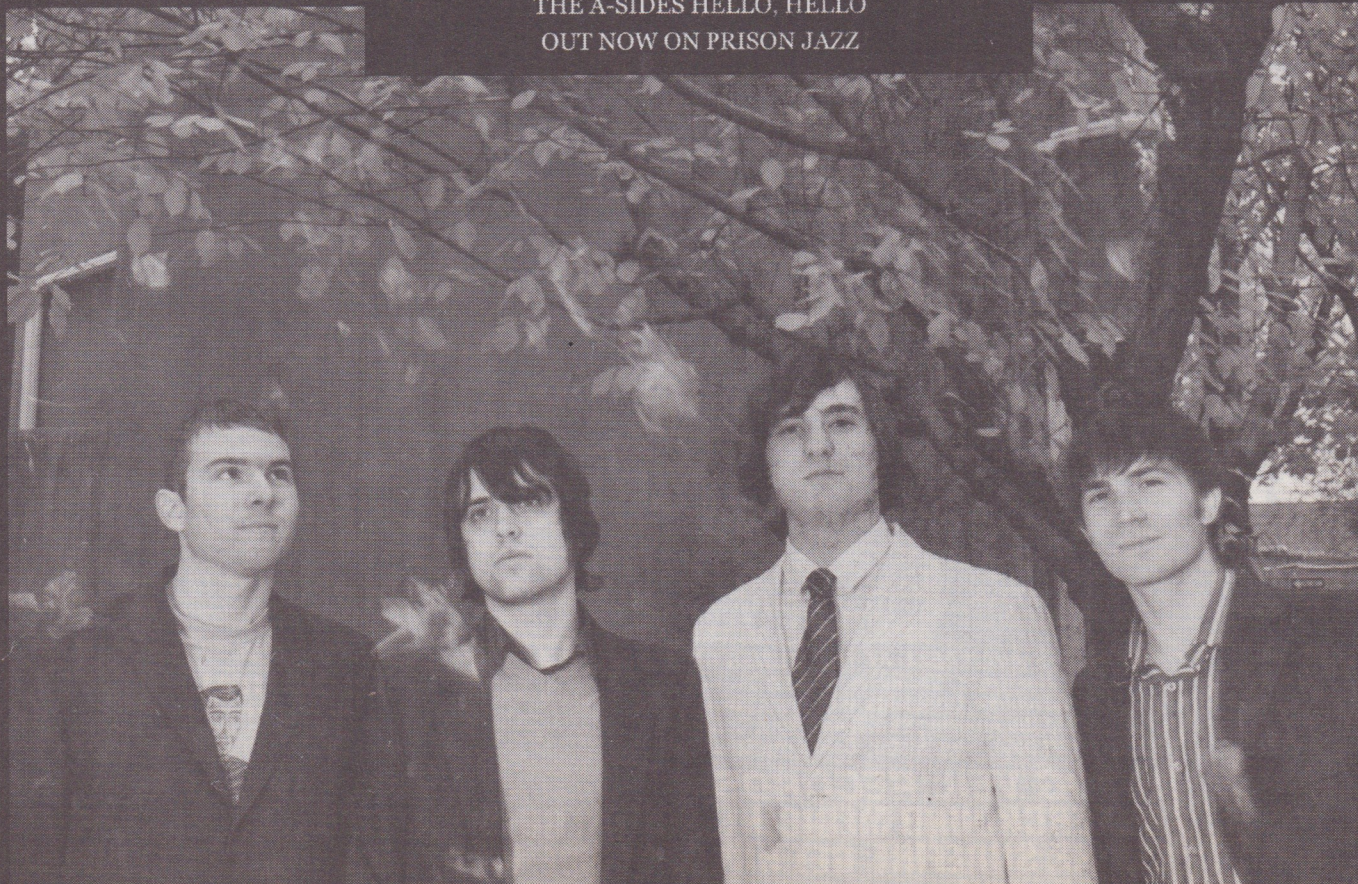


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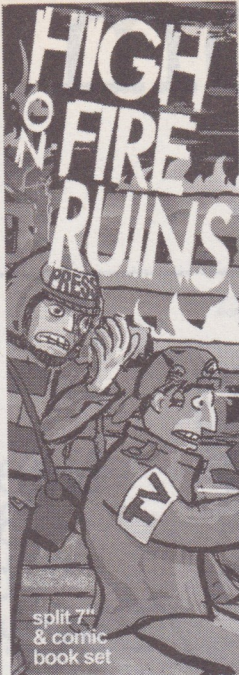
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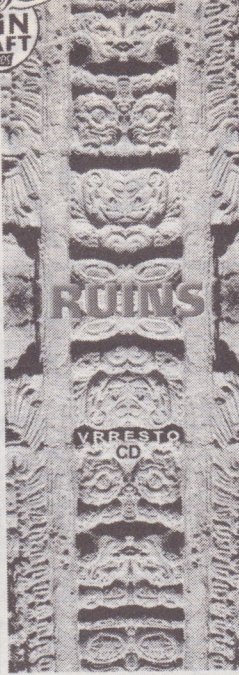
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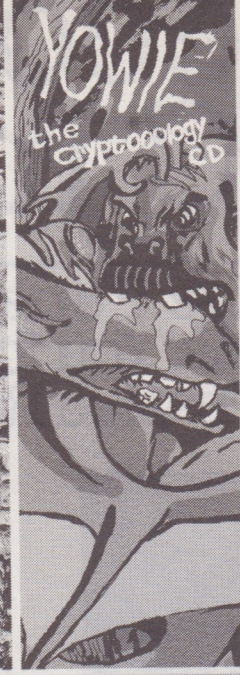


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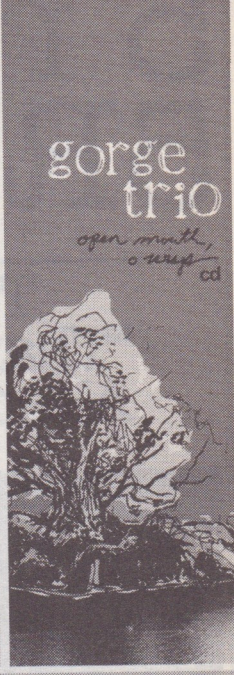


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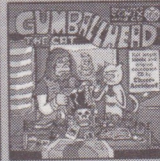


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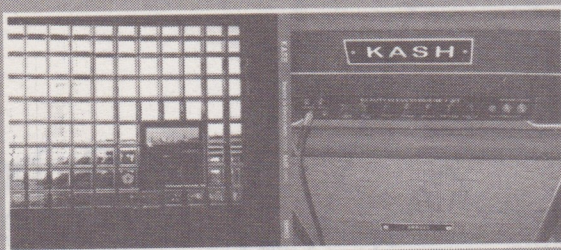


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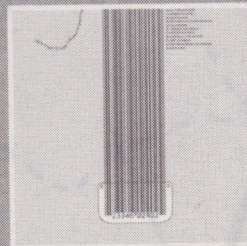
kash



beauty is everywhere & kash cd

Kash are four men from Turin, Italy. This disc is a compilation of their first two EPs, Beauty is Everywhere (2002) and Kash (1999), both of which were engineered at Electrical Audio by Steve Albini.

chevreuil



chateauvallon cd

Chevreuil are an alluring French two-piece. Creating loops and playing live through a series of four different amplifiers, Tony piles layer upon layer of melody and cadence... held together by Julien's spot-on percussion.



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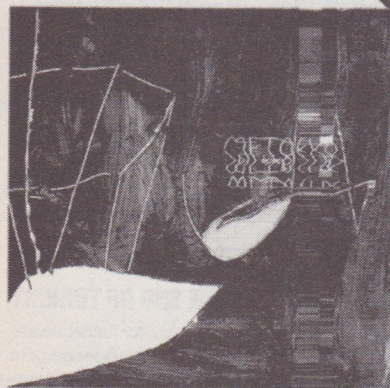
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SCANNING THE DIAL FOR LIFE ON THE MARGINS

"It's not really a blog anymore, but a meeting place, a salon."

DESIGNERS SPEAK UP IN AN ONLINE FORUM FOR THE CRITICAL THOUGHT AND DISCUSSION OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

In the winter of 2002, Armin Vit noticed a lack of intelligent design discussion on the web. Various sites discussed the hippest new companies or the hottest new looks, but no one really dug in and talked about design.

Vit, a designer himself, found this to be an industry-wide problem. "It is important for designers to know how to talk about graphic design," he says. Inspired by *Typographica*, a typographic online journal, he founded *Speak Up*, a virtual meeting place for designers to come together and verbally spar over design issues while educating one another and exchanging information.

Designers slowly took notice of the online forum devoted to critical thought and discussion of design until everyone from unknowns to bigger name designers such as Art Chantry and Michael Beirut were posting on the site.

The site "has leveled the playing field," comments Vit. "Anyone can write. Anyone can have his or her opinion heard if you make a good point. If you take the time to write a thoughtful comment on some topic, people will pay attention. That is what is great: You don't have to be a name to have your ideas published."

Designers found *Speak Up* in many different ways. Some hear through friends and colleagues while others stumbled across it. "Some of my work was being trashed on the site and I inadvertently found out," says Debbie Millman, a *Speak Up* writer and president of Sterling Group, NY office. "I popped in to voice my opinion and add to the discussion and immediately felt that this forum was doing something that I had not fully experienced before. *Speak Up* was holding people accountable. And it was doing

so in real time and in an entirely immediate and meaningful way."

Today, *Speak Up* attracts 7,300 to 13,000 hits per day and has drawn over 25,000 comments on 900 entries during the past two-and-a-half years. The entries range from the redesign of the UPS logo, to how to start your own design studio, to the demise of deconstructive typography. A pool of 14 authors publishes entries pertaining to anything dealing with design. By their involvement in *Speak Up*, these authors have evolved into part of the new crop of up-and-coming design critics and writers.

"It has provided a lot of people a place where they have discovered they can write," states Byrony Gomez-Palacio, designer, contributor and Vit's wife. "In this third generation of authors, there are a couple of people who have never written in their lives other than e-mails, and now they realize that one, they have something to say and two, they can actually say it. Different magazines are beginning to look at *Speak Up* for new voices."

Vit and Gomez-Palacio keep loose reigns over the site, censoring almost nothing and letting the community flourish and police itself. Most members post under their real names and even give links to their portfolio sites, which is almost unheard of on other online forums. Some see this level of openness, freedom, and lack of editing at times as a double-edged sword.

"On the one hand this blog—and it's not really a blog anymore, but a meeting place, a salon—forces designers to collect their thoughts and write intelligently about issues both serious and trivial," comments Steven Heller, art director of the *New York Times Book Review* and design writer and critic. "On the other it allows designers to drivel without the benefit of editorial oversight. Unlike letters to the editor, which are vetted before publication, these immediate response mechanisms thwart circumspection. *Speak Up* is, however, a terrific starting point possibly for the next generation of design critics and commentators."

Pros and cons aside, *Speak Up* is an invaluable space for



"We come from a tradition of non-tradition."

CHICAGO'S WATCHERS CHALLENGE THE FAMILIARITY OF THE MODERN ROCK SONG.

Watchers are the way to go. From the percussive handclaps and unforgettable '60s car-chase riffs of "To the Rooftops," to the heavily-textured, no-wave guitar lines of "Mono Man," this Chicago band plays music that is modern, challenging, and draws from a savvy record junkie's most vaunted collection—the Clash, Talking Heads, dub, soul, and African drum music. Their new album, *Dunes Phase*, captures the band moving in a brave new direction, bringing an intelligent, catchy perspective to the atypical rock song. I talked to Michael Guarrine, the group's propulsive singer, Ethan D'Ericole, guitar player, and Chris Kralik, bassist, before their show at the recently-renovated Fireside Bowl, where Watchers, only a few years before, had played their first set ever.

***Dunes Phase* is a real departure from your first record, which featured more of a dance groove and less aggressive four/four beats. Why'd you decide to move toward a more simplified rock sound?**

Michael: The last record was a full-length that we basically recorded in a week. It was insanely ambitious. We had to do the songs, the string parts, the girl back-up singers. So for *Dunes Phase*, we decided to do it in chunks. We decided to let it breathe,

designers to reach out and teach others and themselves to be better designers. "Frequent visits to *Speak Up*, either as a lurker or participant, may help fellow designers become more insightful and critical of themselves, their

clients, and the profession," states Mark Kingsley, founder of Greenberg Kingsley design and *Speak Up* contributor. "Sitting alone in your cubicle, just doing your job, doesn't help anyone." —Kirsten Sorten

Join the discussion at: www.underconsideration.com/speakup.

"People are living in and breathing this smoke. Something has to be done."

IN THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY OF PILSEN, RESIDENTS ARE JOINING TOGETHER TO COMBAT POLLUTERS.

If something like this was happening in another neighborhood, people would pay more attention," says Juan Miguel Turnil, executive director of the Little Village Environmental Justice Organization in Chicago. "But when

we're talking about our neighborhood, it's not a priority for them. They say, 'We'll look into it.'"

Turnil's concerns about pollution in his neighborhood are mirrored throughout his community. Some vis-

tas in Little Village and nearby Pilsen—adjacent mostly Latino working-class neighborhoods—look like scenes from the industrial revolution. Plumes of smoke and steam billow from smokestacks at two of the country's oldest and dirtiest coal-burning power plants. Freight trains chug along the perimeters, and trucks barrel down the main arteries. Factories making cheese, steel fixtures, and other goods are nestled among quaint residential three-flats, vibrant stretches of small businesses and crumbling but stately columned buildings. Right in the heart of Pilsen, a century-old foundry making brass ingots releases clouds of greenish, foul-smelling smoke.

There are few green spac-

es or even trees. Not surprisingly, rates of asthma and other respiratory problems in the community are high, especially among children. Some of the Mexican families here came from cities with pollution just as bad or worse. Others have never had to deal with this type of soot or grime before.

Since its inception as a magnet for immigrants from Eastern Europe, Pilsen has always been a neighborhood known for community organizing and resistance. Now, residents are putting this energy into cleaning up the neighborhood. And they don't mean getting rid of "undesirable" homeless people or gang members as some use that phrase: They mean forcing polluters to clean up their acts.

so there's a heck of a lot more space. We decided to use the studio as another instrument, to flesh the songs out.

It seems like you're trying to play rock in a new, interesting way. It's hard to do something different with a rock song. Did you make a conscious choice to keep the instrumentation simple—no horns, no strings, no back-up singers?

Chris: The first record proves we're the world's biggest over-analysts when it comes to songwriting. This new record has been a kind of deprogramming to try and trim some of the fat and not to get so in our heads.

Michael: At the time we recorded the first record, we wanted to make it special. We wanted it to sound like nothing else that was happening at that moment. We recorded it on Sly Stone's board; we wanted it to sound like it was in the tradition of some of the music we'd been listening to: Syl Johnson's *Is It Because I'm Black?*, Curtis Mayfield, and other Chicago soul like the Chi-Lites.

Just like the Clash, you're a group of mostly white dudes responding to black soul music. How much of an influence were they?

Ethan: We all grew up with the Clash. I wouldn't say they were a direct influence on the new record, but they're so much in us.

Michael: But other bands as well—like the Slits, who were really influenced by reggae. Early on, we identified with those bands, and started to discover where their influences came from.

Ethan: We're all record collectors and spend a lot of money on records. You can't help but get those sources out of you. Sometimes you'll write a song and realize it's very similar to something you were listening to that day. I've come to grips with the fact that I might be clearly influenced by something. For Dunes Phase, bands like the Outsiders, this Dutch band, were influential, the Ethiopique compilations, and maybe some Alice Cooper.

How do the lyrics connect to the music, Michael?

Michael: All of the songs on Dunes Phase are about these outsider views coming together: from the opening track, "To the Rooftops," where I sing, "I want to be hunted in my homeland," to the other songs throughout. With the lyrics, I was trying to come to grips with how, being in music, we're kind of on the outside a lot, and trying to take different opinions about being outsiders. As a band, we don't necessarily fit on a bill, we get lumped in with other different-sounding bands. Chicago itself is an outsider city. We come from a tradition of non-tradition. The last song, "Blik'em" is a kind of bookend to all the other songs. I sing, "Bless this house, and let the big hand lock us, stare, I am not aware, I am not aware to blink away. I am too aware I'm an outsider." I'm basically saying that we all come from different backgrounds, but we're all in this together, we're all under this one house, this one roof. —Joe Meno

For more on Watchers, go to www.watchersmusic.com.

Until recently, many Pilsen residents didn't even know what was going on in H Kramer, the brass foundry two blocks from one of the neighborhood's few parks. But they knew what came out of it—rancid smelling smoke and particulate matter that would collect on their cars and windowsills.

Scorecard, the pollution information website (www.scorecard.org), lists H Kramer in the top 10 percent of industries nationwide in emissions of toxic and cancer-causing compounds, the main ones being lead and nickel. Lead poisoning is a serious danger that can lead to mental impairment and other problems, especially for the many children in the area.

Last summer, activists with the local Green Party canvassed

for a non-binding referendum on the November ballot in one precinct asking if residents wanted a complete, public investigation of the content and risk factor of H Kramer's emissions. Ninety-five percent said yes. Shortly after, officials from the city's Department of the Environment met with members of a new group calling itself PERRO (Pilsen Environmental Rights and Reform Organization, or in Spanish, "dog," as in watchdog).

"Frequently an overpowering, foul-smelling smoke spews out of the H Kramer building, coming not only from the stacks but even from the cracks between the bricks of the building itself," said Karen Sheets, of PERRO, at a recent press conference. "It has received many complaints

from residents and been fined tens of thousands of dollars by the EPA over the years, but still the pollution continues."

The department agreed to work with PERRO and the EPA to do an investigation of H Kramer. (The president of H Kramer didn't return calls for this story).

Dorian Breuer, a resident activist, noted that working with the city is part of a multi-pronged approach to pollution in the neighborhood. This approach also includes public forums and grassroots action by residents.

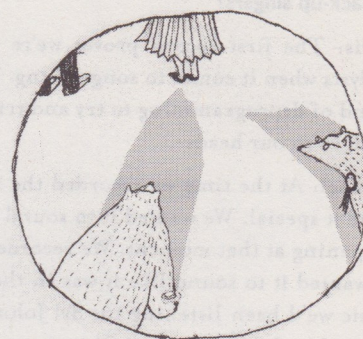
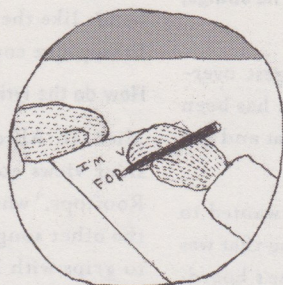
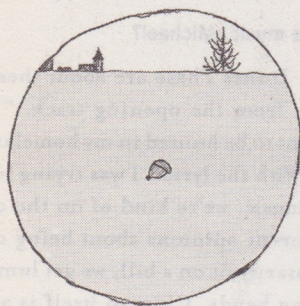
"It may be that the emissions aren't illegal, [and the companies] may be meeting requirements under current policy," Breuer said. "So we may ask them to go beyond

just meeting the requirements. This smoke is filling people's apartments when their windows are open in the summer. People are living in and breathing this smoke. Something has to be done."

For several years now, residents have also been putting pressure on power company Commonwealth Edison and its parent Midwest Generation to reduce emissions at the two coal-burning power plants. Since both were built long before the Clean Air Act took effect in 1977, they are exempt from meeting clean air standards. A 2001 study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health linked the two plants statistically to 41 premature deaths, 2,800 asthma attacks, and 550 emergency room

Iceberg Town BY JOE MENO AND NICK BUTCHER

"After the sad results of the most recent election, many of us fled north. But the great continent could not bear the immense strain: a unnoticeable yet glacier-sized city drifted off into the ocean and the small strange world of Icebergtown was born then.



After some people were attacked by polar bears, the town decided it needed a mayor.

I thought I would be funny so I wrote in "I am voting for the polar bears" on the front of the ballot: so did everyone else apparently and the bears won a decisive victory.

The polar bears' first act as mayor was to eat a ballerina standing nearby: we all watched in horror and then backed away slowly.

visits annually. Local residents worked to place a referendum on the 2003 ballot asking whether the plants should reduce their emissions by 90 percent; that measure also passed resoundingly. A citywide clean air ordinance has been proposed, but without clear support from the mayor it has languished for years without passing.

Activists note that you wouldn't be likely to see things like coal-burning power plants and brass foundries oozing smoke in white, more upscale neighborhoods. Little Village Environmental Justice Organization's Turnil agrees: "We're talking about discrimination and racism against our community." —Kari Lydersen

"I think I do OK farce, but every time I try satire, I see someone else do it better."

INSIDE THE MIND OF COMICS ARTIST TOM HART.

With a new collection out from Top Shelf Comics and daily strips available online, Tom Hart's best-known character Hutch Owen may be tough to avoid in 2005. Claiming enlightenment in the face of greed, corruption, and (worse!) indifference, would-be revolution-

ary Hutch is a voice of anger and despair that somehow avoids cynicism, instead clinging to hopes pinned on the example of the few and the innate decency of the individual. And it's funny, too. I spoke with Hart about what goes into making a Hutch story.

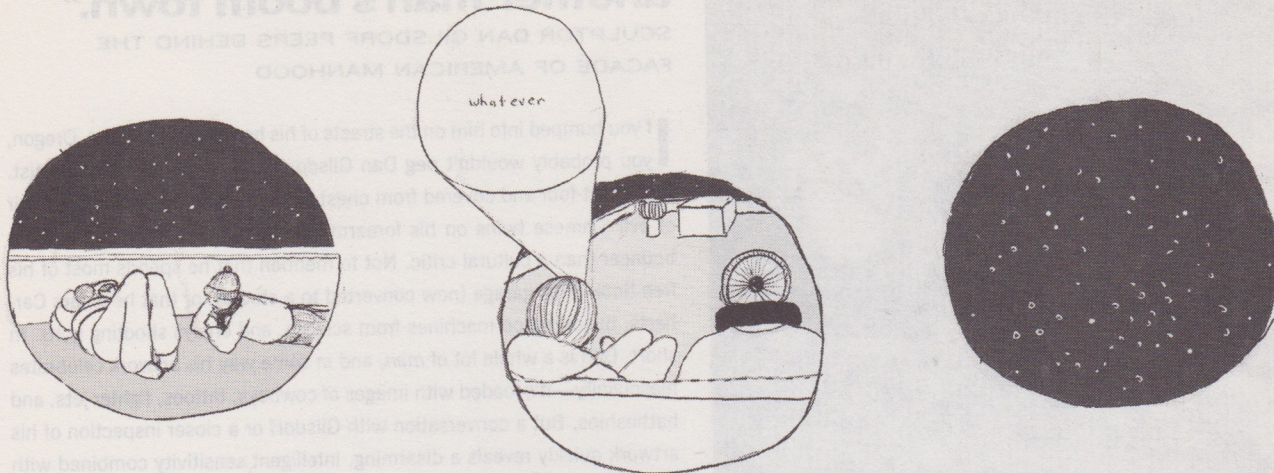
What do you hope readers take from a Hutch Owen story?

I want to create a humorous, intimate look at the struggle of dealing with this world. I actually don't have an agenda; my aim is to just detail the battles that exist in my own heart, and to detail these more vividly by creating a cartoon stage where everything can be focused, intensified and exaggerated to better look at the truth of the whole thing. Hopefully people walk away slightly cleansed, slightly richer from having experienced it.

You've gone from Xeroxed mini-comics to long-form narratives to daily strips. Does your approach to writing change from one format to another?

The medium usually shapes the material, and more often than not, I've chosen my format before doing the work. This is true

lately of the daily and weekly strips I do. I wanted finally to test Hutch Owen out in that sort of format, and had to learn those rhythms and parameters before I began. I suspected, correctly, that this format would allow me much quicker access to the material that was always building up in my sketchbooks, but never fleshed out. ¶ Really, I've only done a few different formats. In my Xerox days I was often at the limits of my ability. That was everything I was capable of. Once I decided to do longer stories, the length was decided by the story—32 pages, 42. One was 93. ¶ There are other things I'd like to try, and in those cases the medium would be the starting point. I'm fond of encyclopedic works that detail entireties of data in complete, ordered form. Lists, contrast and compare, etc. I'd like to do that with Hutch someday.



later that night, I saw Elise throwing a rock through the window of the chunch where the polar bears were known to live; we heard it break and then we ran and hid on the roof of what used to be a 7-11

I asked Elise if maybe she wanted to kiss me: she said "whatever"

but we kissed anyway, watching the stars spell out messages to us until morning.

You've written Hutch stories for 10 years now, the earliest pre-dating the Iraq invasion, the USA PATRIOT Act, September 11, and even Bush's presidency. Have these events changed your readership? And do you approach the stories differently now than, say, six years ago?

I really have no idea who my readers are. It seems the whole culture is much more galvanized, and hopefully some people have become interested in my work. Sad to say, but in this culture, you gotta market everything, and aggressively promote stuff if you want it out there. I do try to get more and more people checking it out, but that eats into drawing time. ¶ As for approaching the stories differently, I think these things you mention have made me angrier. In the early work I was confused by what this cul-

ture expects of its adults. I'm still almost equally confused—though now it's more about why this culture has been allowed to develop to this point. But I can't imagine just ranting all the time. We have Randi Rhodes for that! I need to be constructive in the middle of all this, in my own way—laughter, line and farce.

Until November 10 you shied from humor that specifically addressed the 2004 elections. What made you decide to take it on after the polls closed?

I'm more interested in emotional and psychological truth than commentary. Sifting out world events actually helps me come to new understandings about them. But there are some—September 11 and Bush's victory this November—that went right to my heart, which is where the work comes

from. I had to deal with those issues directly. I felt deeply for some time that Bush couldn't win again. I was so devastated afterwards that I couldn't let it go undealt with. I forced my characters to feel what I felt, which again, is where I start. Another exception is Grover Norquist, a son of a bitch I find so disgusting and weird that I have to comment on him. He's a cartoon character already—just super dangerous. I don't

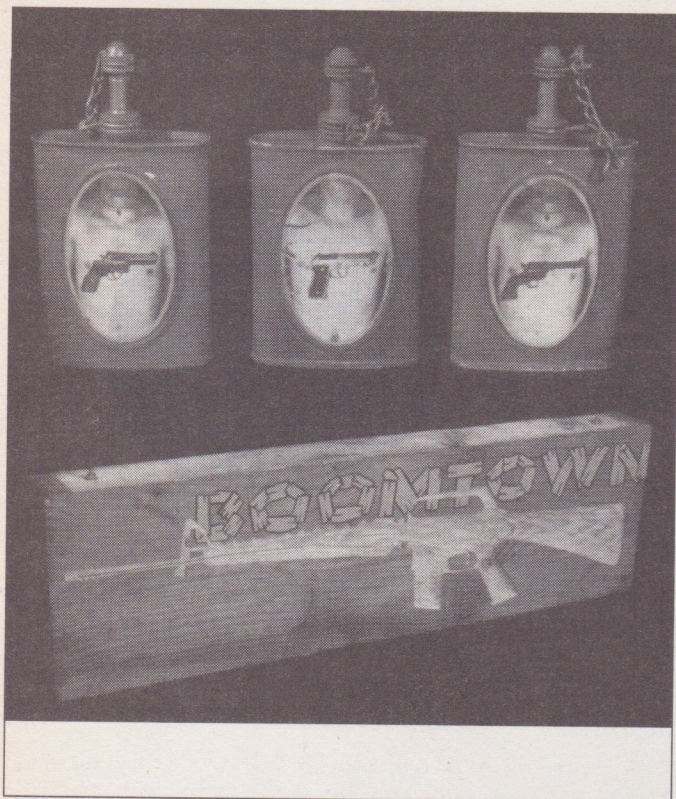
think I'm a very good satirist. I think I do OK farce, but every time I try satire, I see someone else do it better. So I stick with my own reactions, which is usually more useful to me than commenting directly on current events. In these cases that wasn't true. As this culture gets stranger and more dangerous (and thus affecting me more directly and immediately) I may do more straight commentary. —Chris Burkhalter

From Cuba With Love

IRISH FILMMAKER BERNIE DWYER DOCUMENTS THE CUBAN FIVE.

Bernie Dwyer first went to Cuba in 1988 as a *brigadista* working in the orange groves. The Irish journalist and activist has been there on and off ever since, spending many years working on the English language program for

Radio Havana. Now she is touring the US with her film *Mission Against Terror*, which tells the story of the Cuban Five, a group of men arrested in 1998 and sentenced to lengthy prison terms for their work gathering unclassified



"One man's boomtown is another man's boom town."

SCULPTOR DAN GILSDORF PEERS BEHIND THE FACADE OF AMERICAN MANHOOD

If you bumped into him on the streets of his hometown Portland, Oregon, you probably wouldn't peg Dan Gilsdorf as a gender-conscious artist. At six-foot-four and covered from chest to toe in tattoos—including a pair of evil Siamese twins on his forearm—he sometimes looks more like a bouncer than a cultural critic. Not to mention that he spends most of his free time in his garage (now converted to a studio), or that he wears Carharts, builds tattoo machines from scratch, and enjoys shooting guns. In short, Dan is a whole lot of *man*, and in some way his artwork celebrates masculinity—it's loaded with images of cowboys, tattoos, fighter jets, and battleships. But a conversation with Gilsdorf or a closer inspection of his artwork quickly reveals a disarming, intelligent sensitivity combined with a keen and critical eye.

One series of Gilsdorf's photographs feature men's bare torsos with knives, handguns, and various weaponry laid across their hearts. The images themselves are affixed to antique army canteens, suggesting one of the artist's predominant themes: the archaic, dangerous nature of our culture's traditional ideas about manhood and violence. I recently caught up with Dan, *mano y mano*, to discuss his artwork, activism, and the nature of the beast.

information on right-wing Cuban militants in Miami.

Dwyer approached the subject from a purely objective standpoint and says she maintained that attitude all the way through, declining even to meet or correspond with the men to make sure that she didn't become too emotionally involved with the story. What she found through her reporting, she said in February, was an example of clearly biased and irrational behavior by US courts in convicting the men of charges relating to conspiracy and spying when they were not alleged to have procured a single classified document or piece of information.

The film includes clips of right-wing Cuban expatriate Orlando Bosch declaring, on national television, that he sees nothing wrong with blowing up a plane and other acts he has been

charged with because they are in the context of a war against leftist leader Fidel Castro. She documents how the Five actually sought to cooperate with the FBI in avoiding further terrorist acts by right wing Cubans, though they were ultimately rebuffed and ignored by the US government.

One of the main points you seem to be making with this film is that there is a double standard in the US's treatment of alleged or potential terrorism, depending on who the "terrorists" are.

I deliberately called the movie *Mission Against Terror* to point that out. These men were fighting against terrorism. You see [right-wing Cubans] admitting their attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro and to blow up planes. Orlando Bosch is

one of the most dangerous terrorists alive, and Bush [Sr] just ignored that and allowed him to stay here.

Does the double standard you describe have to do with political pressure or lobbying in the US?

Florida is one of the key states in elections. The president wants to get elected, and once he gets in, he wants to stay in. The Cuban right wing have managed to gain power at every level in this country including in the media.

What is the current status of the Cuban Five case, and where can someone get more information?

We're waiting for the results of an appeal filed last March. The judge has asked for more documents, which is a good sign that they're taking it seriously. To

correspond with them—because they will write back—you can go to freethefive.org.

When you're in Cuba, what is daily life like for you?

They don't pay us very much, but I get a ration every month of beans, sugar, rice, butter, coffee, rum. The women get cigarettes if they want them and the men get cigars. Though now there's a big anti-smoking push going on. Just to show the way the media treats Cuba, now they're trying to say that Fidel won't let people smoke anymore. That's ridiculous. This is a very serious socialist project, but they have an understanding that people need to have a good time, to have a drop of rum and a cigar.

—Kari Lydersen

See www.freethefive.org for more on the Cuban Five.

What originally drew you to masculinity as a subject?

It was something I always struggled with personally. Growing up, I was never a particularly masculine person, but not really feminine either. I've always been interested in motivation and what motivates people to behave in illogical ways. Specifically I'm thinking of things like fighting and pridefulness; both of these are based on a lot of ridiculous ideas about masculinity. And now we find ourselves in a situation where our political leadership is unable to separate their rash notions of "manliness" and "resolve" from rational thought concerning foreign policy. The war in Iraq, for example, was sold like some macho cowboy action—it was stated in terms of gender and that made it easier for people to stomach.

I notice a lot of cowboy imagery in your work, like in the woodcarving "Boomtown."

"Boomtown" is about the line between cowboys and soldiers, and it plays with the word "Boomtown" as a double-entendre. When I made the piece I was thinking a lot about Iraq, and the phrase "One man's boomtown is another man's boom town" kept running through my mind—one guy gets riches and "glory," but another guy gets his family slaughtered and his house blown up.

Do you believe in heroes?

I absolutely do. But I find the traditional presentation of heroism a little problematic. Heroic figures ought to be portrayed as they

really are, with all their flaws and difficult traits intact. Most of our cultural heroic canon gets saddled with a veneer of infallibility, but I think heroes do us the most good when we're able to see that they're flawed just like the rest of us. Martin Luther King, for example, is in my top five heroes list, but he was a lot more complex than he's usually portrayed in the media. His philandering was pretty common knowledge.

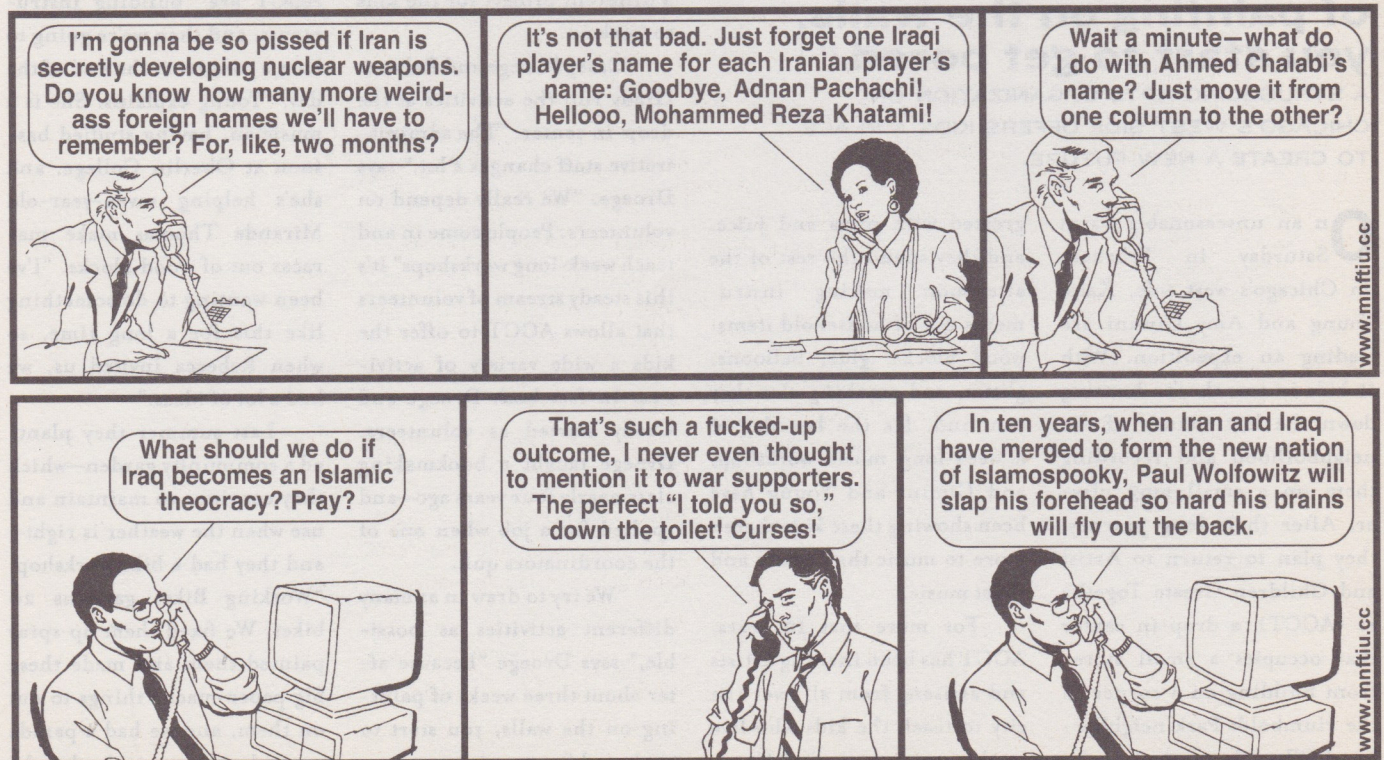
In a culture that tends to value men's capacity to destroy rather than create, how effective a tool is art for political activism?

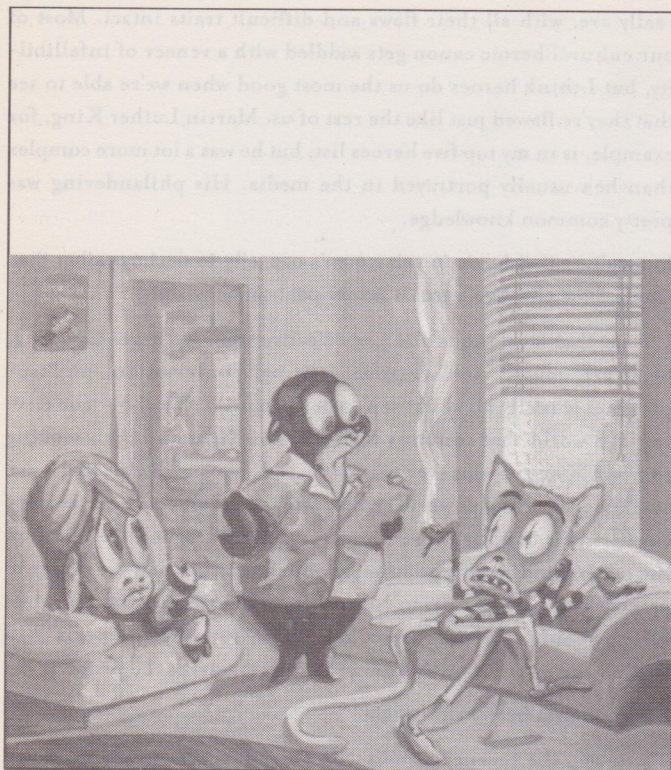
I'd say that it is one of the *most* effective tools we have. Creating, be it art, music, performance, writing, conversation, philosophy, etc. is really all about self-determination. It's about conceiving of a world that contains things it now lacks and then making that world out of whatever materials and using whatever skills are available. This is a powerful thing and it's devalued in our culture because it is bad for those who now control the culture. And on the other hand: with a population who knew they had the power to create their own worlds, to control their own identities, would we tolerate being told how the world works by supposed "experts"? In reality, the population *does* have this power—art is the proof.

Have you ever been in a fistfight?

There was the recent fistfight with the CD player in my studio in which I was soundly defeated. —Justin Hocking

Get Your War On BY DAVID REES





“After about three weeks of painting on the walls, you start to get bored.”

A STRUGGLING ARTS ORGANIZATION ON CHICAGO'S WEST SIDE OFFERS KIDS A PLACE TO CREATE A NEW FUTURE.

On an unseasonably warm Saturday in February on Chicago's west side, Katie Young and Amy Cimini are leading an expedition. With 11 kids in tow they're hunting down the lost sounds of the neighborhood and recording them on a small mp3 player. After their long journey, they plan to return to Artist and Children Create Together (ACCT), a drop-in center that occupies a small storefront building on a corner in the Humboldt Park neighborhood. When they arrive, they're

greeted with pizza and juice, and they spend the rest of the afternoon making instruments out of household items: wood blocks, glue, balloons, glitter, and anything else they can find. It's the last day of a week-long music workshop, and Cimini and Young have been showing these kids there's more to music than scales and sheet music.

For more than 12 years, ACCT has been inviting artists and artisans from all over the city to teach the kids who live in this quiet section of Hum-

“These people are major blasts to be around.”

ARTIST AND SOCIAL WORKER JOHN SPEAR USES ARTWORK AND PERFORMANCE TO CONNECT WITH THE HOMELESS.

There was a time at the close of the last century when the work of John Spear seemed to be everywhere. His *Social Worker* series—a collection of cartoon animals exploring “The real-world relationship of the community mental-health worker and the community participant,” as Spear describes it—the large cloth wall hangings riffing on Japanese refreshments, or his second film *Mantrack* (2000), the Chicago artist and social worker's creations were everywhere. Then suddenly Spear slipped off the radar: no more shows, no news of his current work. He had simply decided to retreat from the public and focus on his new marriage and his position as the Clinical Administrator of Psychosocial Rehabilitation at the Heartland Alliance. Recently, however, he decided to re-enter the art world, and spoke to me about his current work.

How has your re-entry into the art world been?

I've been luckier than most artists. For a while, I didn't have any reason to show my artwork. I didn't want to be more famous. I'd rather be someone who influences other people as a teacher or

boldt Park. Each week they have a different project for the kids to work on.

Casey Droege and Rebecca Grady run the activities at the drop-in center. “The administrative staff changes a lot,” says Droege. “We really depend on volunteers. People come in and teach week-long workshops” It's this steady stream of volunteers that allows ACCT to offer the kids a wide variety of activities. In fact both Droege and Grady started as volunteers. Droege taught a bookmaking class nearly four years ago—and applied for a job when one of the coordinators quit.

“We try to draw in as many different activities as possible,” says Droege “because after about three weeks of painting on the walls, you start to get bored.”

This week, the kids at ACCT are “building instruments, and then we're going to have a concert at the end of the day,” Young explains. She is a musician, having studied bassoon at Oberlin College, and she's helping seven-year-old Miranda Thomas make maracas out of wood blocks. “I've been wanting to do something like this for a long time, so when Rebecca invited us, we had a lot of ideas.”

Last summer they planted a community garden—which they continue to maintain and use when the weather is right—and they had a bike workshop. “Working Bikes gave us 20 bikes. We fixed them up spray painted them and made these big paper-mache things to put on them, and we had a parade around the neighborhood.”

social worker and apply my art to that endeavor. That type of recognition is a rarity.

How does your work with the homeless relate to your artwork?

As a clinical administrator there is a good deal of work that simply has to be done. The same can be said for stretching and preparing a canvas: It doesn't feel particularly artistic. My direct-service and training opportunities relate to art most obviously but I bet my boss would disagree and say I appear to think oddly—as an artist—most of the time in my other functions as well.

What is your process, then, and how does the issue of homelessness affect the work produced?

For the last several years I have been doing puppet performances with groups of students, clinicians, and participants. They watch a puppet show of a scene between a social worker and Emmitt, the “difficult mentally ill client.” It goes like this: the social worker shows up and tries to get Emmitt to accept mental health treatment with a variety of interventions. Unless the social worker is perfect—and who is—Emmitt's directive is to resist if he isn't met on his level. From there the group of participants are invited to critique the social workers' methods and discuss personal anecdotes of disappointment or satisfaction with their interactions with social workers. After a bunch of very interesting perspectives, we take the

crowds' recommendation to correct the social worker behavior and act it out to their satisfaction. It is one of the highlights of my week. Watching them defend the social worker's bad behavior, recognizing opportunities for growth, and then contributing to change them. It is an empowering creative process and artistically satisfying. ¶ There are a bunch of other methods that are client-specific. I collaborated with this guy who was pissed off with nearly everybody including me. I told him I wanted to give him a good time dealing with his anger. I told him that it would be OK for him to draw his violent fantasies that he had about other people and project them onto me in drawings while I counseled him. He ended up drawing hundreds of monsters destroying me with hammers, heavy earthmovers, and diatribes. We laughed and laughed about them. They seemed to really help him. He became very adept at managing his anger. It was good for both of us. The wealth of talent in this population is enormous. Totally the funniest people on Earth, smart funny. These people are major blasts to be around.

How do you deal with accusations of “colonizing” or “using” homeless subjects as an educated artist?

Let me try to express it this way: I try to maintain a moral mindfulness on the issue of exploitation. If someone has this issue with my art I am unaware of it. —Ben Tanzer

See www.heartlandalliance.org for more.

Other workshops have included video workshops where the kids made action figures and shot videos imitating the style of *MTV Crips*.

It's Miranda's first day at the drop in center. Her family recently moved into the neighborhood. While eating her fourth piece of pizza, she says, “My mom sent me because I like to draw. Everyday when I'm done with my homework I just draw and draw.” Miranda has a twin brother, “but he wouldn't want to come, and I'm glad—he bothers me.”

Unfortunately for kids like Miranda, ACCT has fallen on some difficult times. The organization recently lost both their regular grants; now they're almost completely dependant on community and private donations. On top of that, gentri-

fication is pushing families out of the neighborhood. “A lot of our regulars have moved away because of the new condos that were built in the neighborhood,” says Droege. “And we haven't really been able to establish a relationship with the new neighbors yet.”

In January, Droege and Grady cut their hours almost in half. Still, Droege isn't ready to give up. She's looking for some part-time work, but she's also looking to find new funding. “It's a really wonderful place to work,” she says. “We just have so much freedom. Last year we had an end-of-the-semester party. We turned the whole front room into Alaska, we toasted marshmallows to make smores over a little camping stove, and we told ghost stories. You couldn't do that anywhere else.”

The most amazing part for both Grady and Droege is the way they've become a fixture of the neighborhood. “They know where we live,” adds Grady. “They know they can come knock on our door and ask us when the art place is

open, and they know they can borrow our bike pumps.”

“It's not just a job,” says Grady. “We've invested a lot of our energy and it's always worth it. The more we put into it, the more fun we have.”

—Cate Levinson

“At this point in my life I'm still scared shitless to be creative in front of people.”

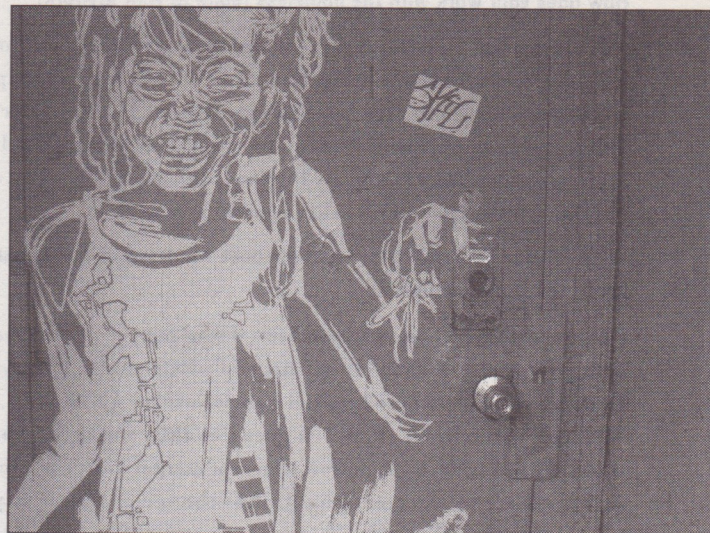
ARTIST MOLLY ZUCKERMAN TALKS ABOUT DEPICTING FEMALE DESIRE, LED ZEPPELIN, AND TREES.

In middle school, Molly Zuckerman was tortured for being too loud, too big, and too smart. Probably the most well-read person I've ever met, Molly has spent her adult life working in book stores, traveling, writing, thinking, and more recently, painting. Her work feels investigative, with a roughness,

beauty and intelligence that manages to both skew and honor her subjects—who range from Michael Jackson to George W Bush, and include babies, rock stars, and the artist herself. We became friends over time, together developing our loudness, bigness, and smartness in the context of punk rock, femi-

GALLERY: Up Against A Wall

ARTWORK BY SWOON



nism, politics, trees and rain. Molly recently spent a year running a gallery in our hometown of Olympia, WA, and then left to formally study art for the first time at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. We caught up there to talk about her current work.

What are you working on now?

The question I keep coming back to these days is women's sexual power. I like thinking about it in terms of revolutionary potential, and also in terms of my own life. I make art about it even when I don't want to. I put vaginas in trees. Just paint a vagina into a tree, and I don't know why. It's very 1970s, consciousness-raising stuff. What is female desire? What is it to be an active desirer? What is it to want anything?

Tell me about the pictures.

I like to paint trees. I got really obsessed with trees when I first moved here.

You used to hate trees!

It's true! I would actually talk about *hating* trees. I got romanced by the trees here. They got all boney in the fall, and they looked really gaunt and skeletal and interesting. I'd stop my bike and draw them all the time.

How have your paintings been affected by growing up in the Olympia punk scene?

I think of myself as completely formed by both the terrible experiences of middle school and high school, and then the punk, queer, indie rock scene. You know I only started painting seven years ago. I feel like it was this desperate attempt to find a creative outlet. I've always been an artist, or you know, an

outsider, whether I'm choosing it or whether it's put upon me. So I would have found an outsider scene of some kind. And I just happened to be in Olympia so I stayed there. I wanted to be a musician, basically, or a performance artist. ¶ Instead I was just mad all the time, 'cause I wasn't doing anything, I felt like I didn't have a participatory identity. Finding painting for me was the beginning of not being a spectator. At this point in my life I'm still scared shitless to be creative in front of people. Painting allows for all this expression, all this free movement, all this joy and color and beauty and pain, but nobody else has to know I'm doing it while I'm doing it. Then I can step aside and people can look at it, but I don't have to be the embodiment of it.

You're listening to Led Zeppelin

as we talk. What do you think of Led Zeppelin?

I think they rock. It's very sexy music, and totally offensive. It always makes me freak out and just wanna go burn down a city, do a lot of coke, and then fuck all night long. Not that I ever do any of that—I just stay in my house feeling that way. I get really mad that men are allowed to feel desire to this crazy degree, rock out with their cocks out or whatever.

So are you saying that you're a feminist?

Yeah. I feel like that's old fashioned, like I should be post-feminist. But society is so god-damned misogynist. Misogyny and racism and classism—between those three things, there's no space. I'm just fighting to keep clarity here. —Nomy Lamm



New York City-based Swoon uses linoleum block or woodcut printing techniques and lifesize paper cut-outs to comment on and contribute to the decay of forgotten urban areas in her city. Read more at www.globalgraphica.com.

"Punk grows like a tree."

REMEMBER NINA HAGEN? THE SINGER OF "99 RED BALLOONS" IS BACK WITH NEW MUSIC AND A LINE OF CLOTHING.

Outrageous Nina Hagen: There was the time Nina was asked on an Austrian talk show what was wrong with the youth of today; she replied by masturbating. Or, there was Nina on MTV in its early days, talking to a UFO through her shoe. But Nina's antics have sometimes eclipsed the whole of her: Nina Hagen—serious animal rights activist, environmentalist, spiritual devotee, and master vocalist and songwriter.

Nina entered 2004 with *Big Band Explosion*, Hagen-ized versions of jazz and pop standards. And now she's got a clothing line—Mother of Punk—all up and ready to explode.

Your new fashion line, Mother of Punk, doesn't contain any fur or leather. Why do you think so many designers are still clinging to these materials?

They lack the ethics, vision and humanity! They are money-hungry monsters who don't give a shit! People like Naomi Campbell first fought for the cause of treating animals ethically, and then changed their minds. They represent the dinosaur-fashion era. The glamour world is great fun, but we need to evolve.

What made you nod to your punk past in naming your line?

In my heart and soul, I am

both a punk and a mother. I found so much love, creativity, solidarity and freedom in the punk movement of the late '70s. Punk is not limited. Punk embraces everything but rejects ignorance. Punk grows like a tree. Punk is universal. Punk is fun, humor, rebellion and individualism. It's like a child: free, honest and sweet and sometimes very loud and even angry, silly and ridiculous.

***Big Band Explosion* was released independently, after years of your appearance on major labels.**

I am just a musician. I love making music—love singing, writing, producing, creating. Independent label or not, it's what it is. I prefer to work, produce, and finance my albums myself, and when production is finished, then we find the

right company. Major companies tended to be too involved in my artistic territories. That was too many cooks cooking in one pot.

Do you get discouraged by the state of the world, or are you filled with so much faith that it never keeps you down?

The state of the world is our lesson in karma. The state of the world starts within each of us. Let's all find and treasure the source, the immortal true self: ourselves. We cannot love the world if we don't love ourselves. Therefore we must fight the good fight. With truth, love and force, because we have to force ourselves out of lethargy. We must force ourselves to be happy and healthy, true and great.

—Jojoboy

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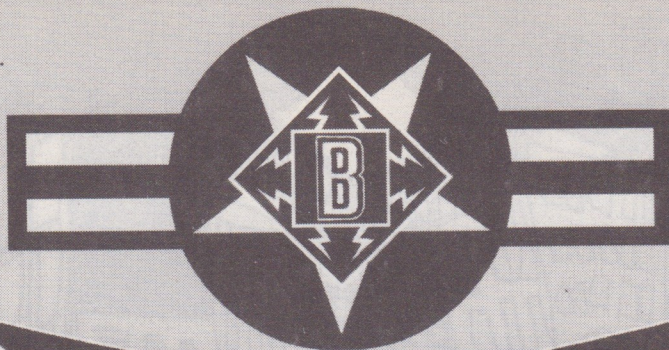
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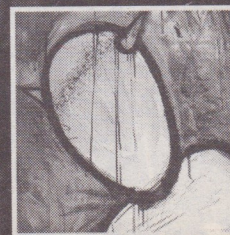
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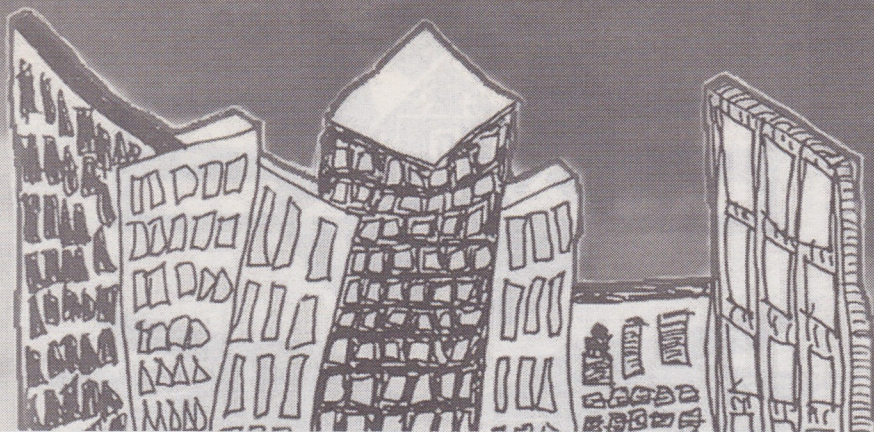
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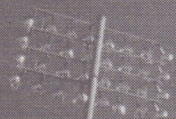


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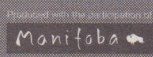


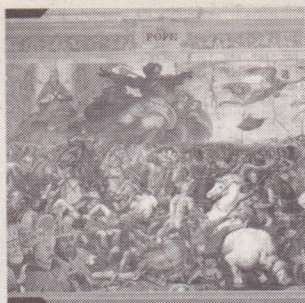
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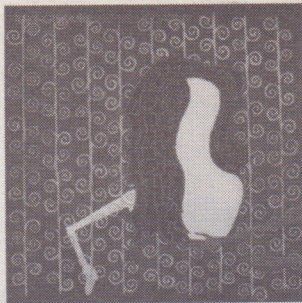
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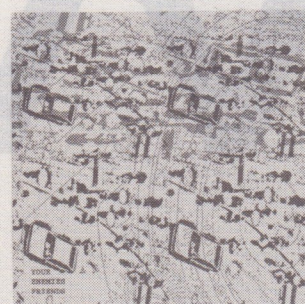
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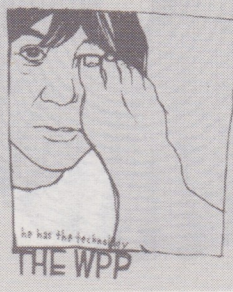
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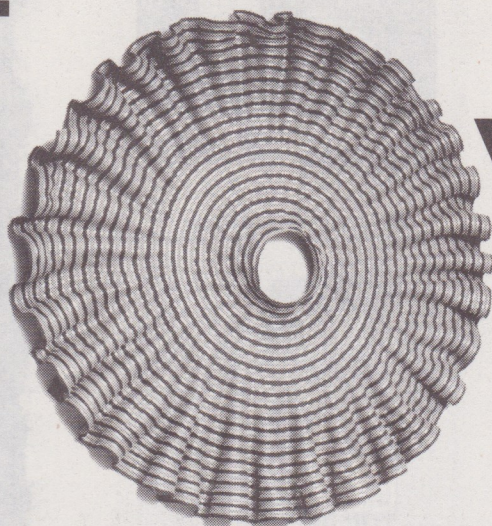


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THE EVENS

Cat Chow



It may sound strange, but there's something about seeing a Cat Chow dress up close that takes me back to my sixth-grade science class, when our teacher had us prick our fingers and smudge a single drop of blood on a thin sheet of glass so we could examine it under a microscope. I had read about cells, cell membranes, and mitochondria, but I was skeptical until I saw the dark red fade as I turned up the magnification to get a closer look. Suddenly everything I saw seemed more fascinatingly complex than I had ever imagined.

So years later, when I first read about Chow—a Chicago-based artist/fashion designer who uses chain-mail techniques to render garments from a wide variety of common household items, like tape measures, tissues, cellular phones, dollar bills, and anything else she can get her hands on—I had to check it out. Chow's work is a strange brew of the resourceful DIY craft, high art, avante-garde couture, and complex geometric design. From far away, the clean lines of her pieces are elegantly understated and simple, but on closer inspection you'll often find her work is an elaborate puzzle in which each piece has been joined by hand, one at a time.

Chow is gaining recognition throughout the fashion and art communities for her stunning, imaginative designs as well as her meticulously constructed garments. In 2000 she received

the Avante Garde Design Vision award in Gen Art International Design Competition. In 2003 she won the very prestigious Louis Comfort Tiffany Award. Most recently, she received the 2005 Fellowship Award in Visual Arts from the Illinois Arts Council. She has also scheduled several shows throughout the US in 2005, and in March she will be showing her work in Paris for the first time.

I had a chance to visit with Cat Chow and her two tail-less cats in February where she showed me her latest zipper concoctions and explained how she discovered her calling for a fashion statement that saw its heyday in the Dark Ages.

Interview by **Cate Levinson**

Portrait by **Suzy Poling**

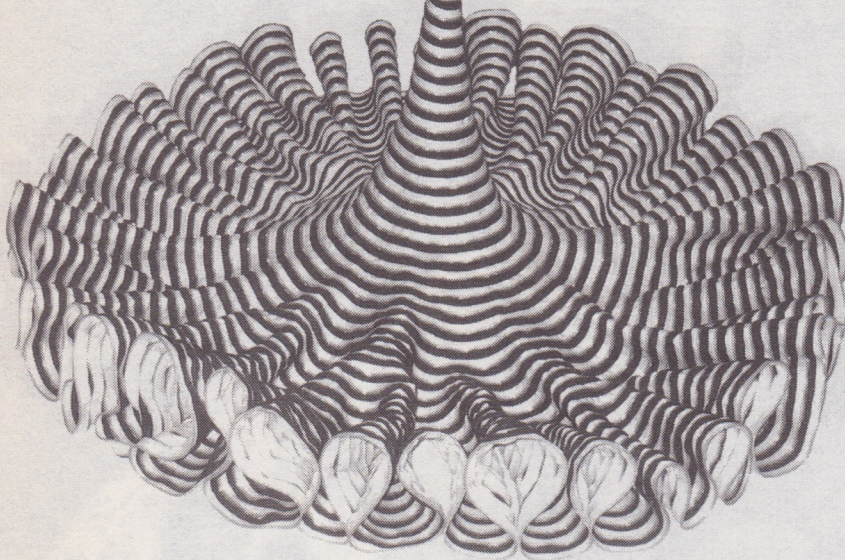
So you started making chain mail in college, and it's continued to be a major influence for you. Why?

I continue working on it and even though my work has changed a lot, it's the medium I feel most comfortable working in. My early chain-mail works were done in this very basic pattern. In my early work I was sticking to the materials and patterns used to make medieval armor. And if you look at my recent work, I really try to challenge

ABOVE: *Consume* (2003)
two single lengths of zipper



Bouquet (2005)
a single length of zipper



myself to invent new ways of putting the pieces together. I love chain mail because you can add and take away pieces seamlessly. I have a strong math background, so I like figuring that out.

You were a good math student? Is that what you were studying in school?

Well, when I came out here for school at Northwestern, I was accepted into this accelerated math/social science program. I hadn't even thought about it when I made the decision. I got accepted, and I didn't think about whether or not I actually wanted to do it, I just went. Halfway through my first quarter there, I realized I didn't want to be in it. I would hear all these theater majors who lived on my floor talk about how they had to go to costume crew, and go sew all afternoon after they got out of class. Technically they were *complaining* about how they had to sew all afternoon, but I was like, "You got to sew all afternoon? And you're making all these costumes? That sounds really interesting!" I had always been interested in clothing, and I did a lot of hand sewing when I was younger, so I dropped out of the program, and switched over. ¶ My career has followed what feels like a very natural pro-

gression. Even though I never knew where I would end up, I took one step at a time, and I'm really happy with where it's taken me. It goes back to the summer after I finished high school and I worked for my friend's mom, who owns this jewelry factory. That's where I first worked with these tools—like needle-nose pliers—and I loved it. I loved working with my hands. I worked so much that summer, just because I was so into it. By the end of the summer I was so sad to leave, I almost didn't want to go to college because I loved it so much. ¶ By the time I got to school, I had an inkling that I really like this sort of work. It all came together in this funny way: I switched to this theater major, and then I found out that there was this store in Evanston where they made chain mail. I got a job there, and that's how I learned to work in this medium. I got so into it, I asked them to pay me in little metal rings instead of money so I could start making chain mail on my own. I made this little chain mail vest for a school project, but I had no way of predicting that it was going to shape what I would do later in life. ¶ After I graduated, I was more interested in fashion, and so I assisted different people in the business—a couple clothing designers, a hat maker, a

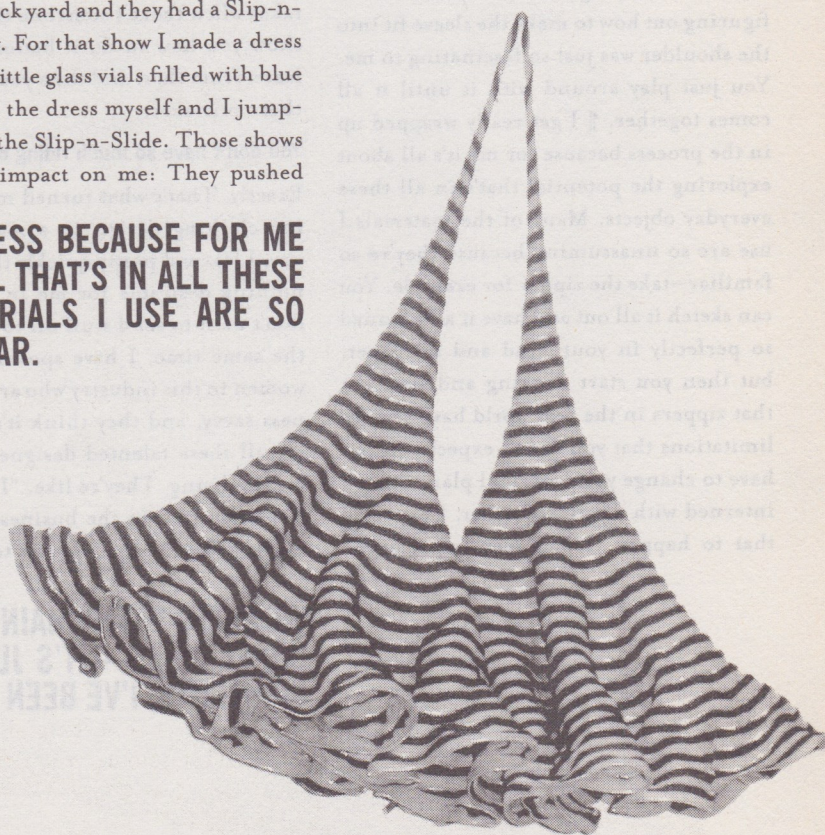
pattern maker, a shoe maker, a fiber artist . . . For a while, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was working for all these different designers, and I was learning a lot, but I couldn't envision what my own work would look like. Then one day I ran into this guy I went to college with, and he was like, "What about your chain mail?" and it threw me a little. I was like, "That's it!" and I went out and bought these little rings and I started making all these different things. At the same time I was really into using all these non-traditional fabrics—materials not generally considered fabric, like Astroturf—to make wearable garments. It was as if a light turned on in my head. I got this idea to incorporate the everyday objects with the techniques I used to make chain mail to make a completely different kind of fabric. And then I had this opportunity to put a few of my pieces in a fashion show. From there, someone told me about a gallery where they were putting together a wearable art exhibition, and the same thing happened after that exhibition. Opportunities continue to pop up for me, and they fit into my interests, so I take them.

When did you first begin to incorporate everyday objects like baby bottle nipples and tape measures into your work?

Well, it all just sort of evolved for me.

When I started out, I was working with objects that are traditionally used to make chain mail. At that point it was more craft than art. In the end I had this fabric, but as an object it wasn't associated with any particular meaning. So when I was starting to get back into making chain mail, I was working these garments out of Astroturf. ¶ At the time, there were these two guys who had graduated from the Art Institute who ran *GoodLookin'* magazine, and they would have these satirical fashion shows—they would poke fun at snooty fashion shows and the fashion industry as a whole, but actually they were really amazing shows. They would have a theme, for example one show had a spy theme, and that's when I used the Astroturf. I had these three women dressed in Astroturf suits walking down the runway with the music from *Charlie's Angels* playing in the background, and they tossed these golf balls that were hidden in these secret pockets I had built into the suits. That summer they had a water-themed fashion show that took place in someone's back yard and they had a Slip-n-Slide runway. For that show I made a dress out of these little glass vials filled with blue water. I wore the dress myself and I jumped down the Slip-n-Slide. Those shows had a huge impact on me: They pushed

I GET REALLY WRAPPED UP IN THE PROCESS BECAUSE FOR ME IT'S ALL ABOUT EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL THAT'S IN ALL THESE EVERYDAY OBJECTS. MANY OF THE MATERIALS I USE ARE SO UNASSUMING BECAUSE THEY'RE SO FAMILIAR.



Tassle (2005)
a single length of zipper

me to think more creatively about my own ideas about clothing and fashion, and they also allowed me to look more critically at the fashion world.

When you're using materials that seem unwearable—or even potentially dangerous—do you think of the body that might wear them? Like with the dress made out of the glass vials, it makes sense that you would decide to wear that dress instead of hiring a model.

That definitely poses a problem for the garments I make. Early on I did a lot of fashion shows, and people would complain—especially the models. They would say, “This is heavy, and the metal is cold. I can’t even sit down in it!” But it was like we were speaking two different languages. Obviously, I wasn’t trying to make a practical garment. I wasn’t interested in comfort, so I guess I wasn’t thinking of the body that would go inside the clothing, I just saw them standing on their own. For me they were these huge geometric puzzles, so the mathematical challenge is really what appealed to me. I remember trying to make my first sleeve; figuring out how to make the sleeve fit into the shoulder was just so fascinating to me. You just play around with it until it all comes together. ¶ I get really wrapped up in the process because for me it’s all about exploring the potential that’s in all these everyday objects. Many of the materials I use are so unassuming because they’re so familiar—take the zipper for example. You can sketch it all out and have it all planned so perfectly in your head and on paper, but then you start working and find out that zippers in the real world have certain limitations that you didn’t expect and you have to change your original plan. Since I interned with a pattern maker, I expected that to happen. I had seen experienced

artists go through that very same process. I always try to keep that in mind; I know from the start that the materials are going to surprise me and won’t necessarily conform to the plan I outline. ¶ When I was teaching at the School of the Art Institute, and I always encouraged my students to do as many internships as they possibly could. You learn so much working one-on-one, it’s a totally different experience than you get when you’re doing schoolwork.

Did you encourage internships because there’s so much more at stake when you’re working in a real-world environment? It’s an environment where the primary motivation isn’t to learn, it’s to make a living.

Definitely. In fashion it really comes down to business sense. A lot of people fail because they come out of school and they want to start their own business right away. There’s so much that you don’t know at that point, and for me, it was really good to learn from someone older who had some real wisdom and experience. You’re much better off if you make mistakes when there’s someone there who can show you how to do it better. You really learn from that, and then you don’t repeat those mistakes.

You don’t have so much riding on mistakes.

Exactly. That’s what turned me off on doing clothing design in a mass-produced way. I learned pretty quickly that there was nothing desirable for me in that field. I don’t want to send stuff off to a factory. At the same time, I have spoken with many women in this industry who are more business savvy, and they think it’s a shame to see all these talented designers who can’t make a living. They’re like, “I know you’re less interested in the business aspect and making fashion that appeals to mass audi-

ence, but perhaps there are ways you can supplement your income so that this career is an economically viable option for you and you can support yourself as an artist.” I think that’s an interesting exercise. Working with chain mail poses some pretty fundamental challenges—it’s just not that wearable. So instead of garments, I’ve been making these functional art pieces. I’ve been working on this one piece—I can only describe it as a chain-mail flower ball. The piece is interesting as an art piece when it’s not being used, but then you pick it up and you realize, “Oh my gosh, it’s a purse, or it’s this interesting necklace or bracelet!” Making items like this allows me to work in small quantities. It’s important to me that the objects are personal and special. I don’t want to design something and send them off to a factory—that doesn’t appeal to me at all.

I’ve seen the zipper dress you made in a couple of different colors, but when I saw it in white, it looked like a wedding dress. Did you do that on commission?

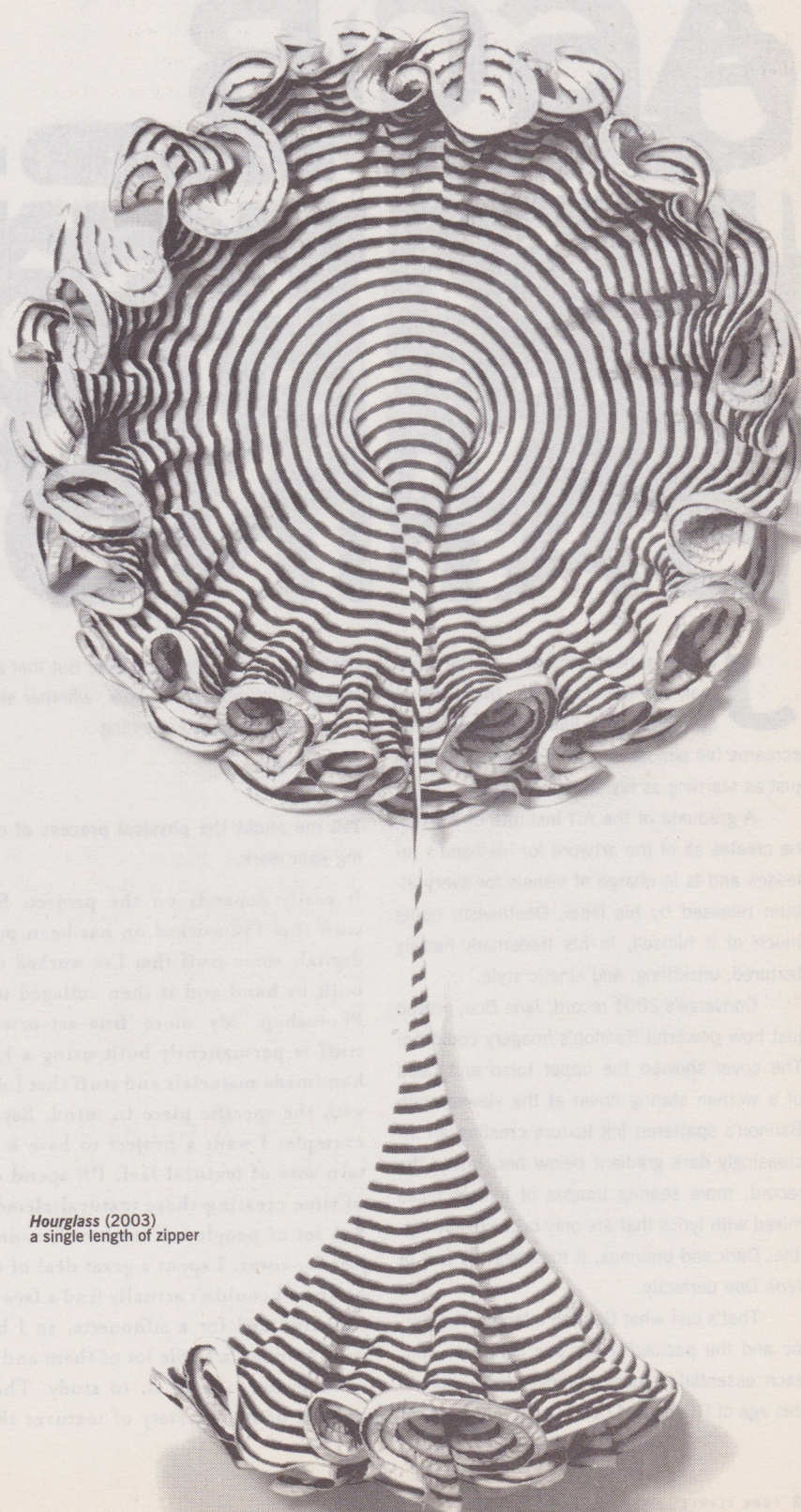
Yes, I’ve made a few zipper dresses on commission, and one as a wedding dress. At some point I thought the zipper dress could be commercially viable in mass production—it’s more comfortable than my other designs—but that dress is really tricky. It has to fit snugly, so it really has to be constructed for a particular body. It isn’t cut from a pattern; it’s a continuous spiral starting at the top. I showed it to this patternmaker I used to work with, and I was trying to explain it to her, and she couldn’t understand it. The person wearing it has to be pretty close to my body size in order for it to work. ¶ That dress is really good example of a functional art object. When you unzip it all the way, it lays down in

WORKING WITH CHAIN MAIL POSES SOME PRETTY FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES—IT’S JUST NOT THAT WEARABLE. SO INSTEAD OF GARMENTS, I’VE BEEN MAKING THESE FUNCTIONAL ART PIECES.

this perfect spiral, and it's completely unrecognizable. When you see it unzipped, the last thing you would guess is that it's a dress. I call it "unDressed" and when it's lit in this particular way on a pedestal, or hung on the wall, it changes the meaning completely. For a long time I showed my work on the dress forms, but I found that when I let go of that mold, I began to push my ideas forward. ¶ The zipper pieces I've been making lately aren't even garments at all, they're just a single zipper, but they make these wild shapes. I take the two halves of a zipper and join them until they make an object that is interesting to me.

Have you had to turn someone away because a particular design isn't right for them? It seems like that would be an awkward experience.

Well, I think that the people who have commissioned me probably notice the difference between working with me and going to a boutique. I don't gush over people; I'm not like "Oh my, that looks *fabulous!*" I can't do that. I can't kiss ass like that. I really don't like going into a boutique where the salespeople—who are working on commission—do that. It's so fake and artificial. That's why I like being my own agent. I don't go through a gallery or a middleman. I deal directly with a client through the entire process, so it's a win-win situation. And I can offer them a fair price. ¶ It's funny when I think about the advice people used to give me when I first started doing my work. They would say, "You know, Cat, you really have to pick: fashion or art. You can't do both." But I think I've done a pretty good job of straddling that line. I'm doing both. It keeps my mind open to all sorts of possibilities, and I've never had to compromise my integrity. ©



Hourglass (2003)
a single length of zipper

JACOB BANNON

Jacob Bannon is *intense*. As the frontman for Converge, his thin, tattoo-covered frame flails on stage as he screams his almost inhuman vocals. His art is just as startling as his stage presence.

A graduate of the Art Institute of Boston, he creates all of the artwork for his band's releases and is in charge of visuals for every album released by his label, Deathwish, doing much of it himself, in his trademark heavily textured, unsettling, and kinetic style.

Converge's 2001 record, *Jane Doe*, proved just how powerful Bannon's imagery could be: The cover showed the upper torso and head of a woman staring down at the viewer, with Bannon's spattered ink texture creating an increasingly dark gradient below her. Inside the record, more searing images of female faces mixed with lyrics that are only occasionally legible. Dark and ominous, it matches the feel of *Jane Doe* perfectly.

That's just what Bannon intends. The music and the packaging are one complete unit, each essential to understanding the other. In this age of iTunes and CD burning, his focus on

packaging seems almost passe. But that attention to detail makes his work, whether albums or fine-art pieces, so arresting.

By Kyle Ryan

Tell me about the physical process of creating your work.

It really depends on the project. Some stuff that I've worked on has been purely digital; some stuff that I've worked on is built by hand and is then collaged using Photoshop. My more fine-art-oriented stuff is permanently built using a lot of handmade materials and stuff that I make with the specific piece in mind. Say, for example, I want a project to have a certain sort of textural feel. I'll spend a lot of time creating those textural elements. ¶ A lot of people ask me how I made the *Jane Doe* cover. I spent a great deal of time on that. I couldn't actually find a face that I really liked for a silhouette, so I basically scanned a whole lot of them and had a whole lot to look at, to study. Then I built it using a variety of textures that I

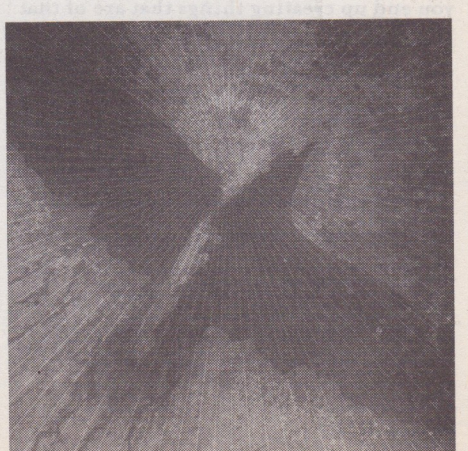
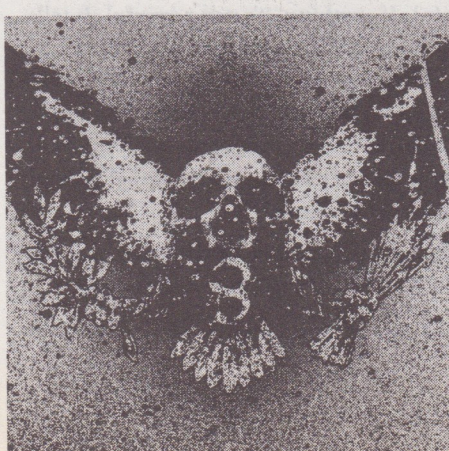
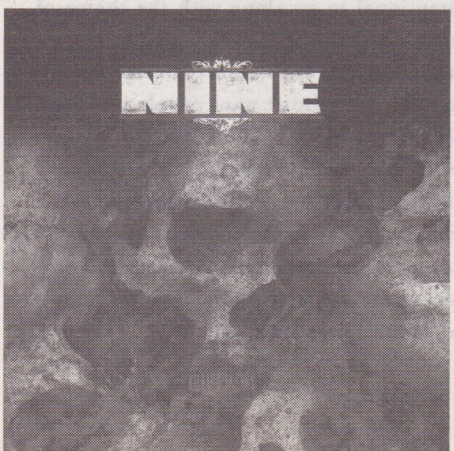
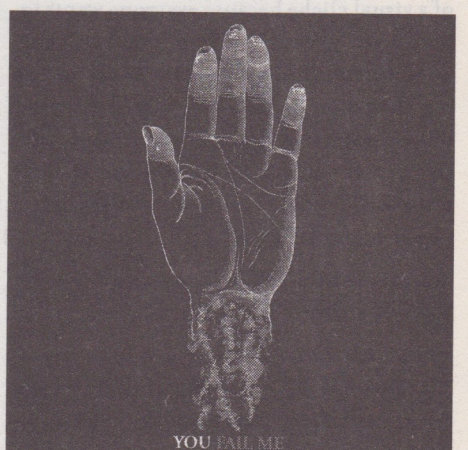
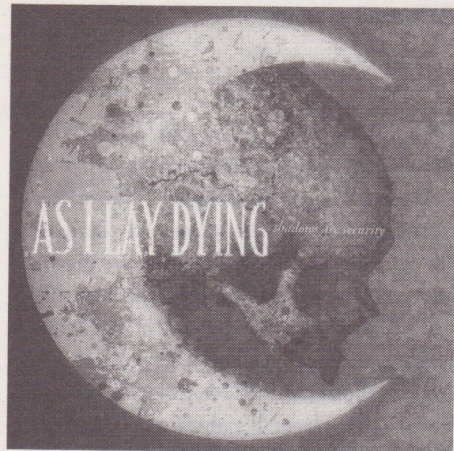
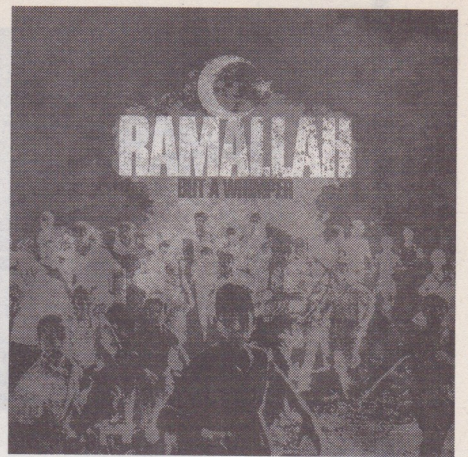
made using ink and acrylics and things like that.

Does your work start digitally or on paper?

It sort of jumps between the two worlds. Say for example I'm trying to make something digitally and I can't. I'll then spend a great deal of time working on that and trying to push it by hand as far as possible before I have to jump back into the digital world with it.

Your art is almost always unsettling. Is that your artistic vocabulary, so to speak, or does that mostly come from the project it's associated with?

There's always sort of an underlying style that I have and a way that I like to approach things. I like all my stuff to have power. If you could equate visual work with horsepower, I want to soup them up as much as possible. ¶ Although I am a designer, and I do want to be as versatile as possible, I've been sort of pigeonholed into doing one specific kind of thing or at least variations on one thing all the time. People come to





me, and they go, "Hey, I want our record to look like a Converge record. I want our record to look like record A, B, or C, and has that textural feel." And I go, "I'm not going to replicate that for you, but I can create something using some of those elements that I happen to be good at and I know how to manipulate well. I can do that for you utilizing your own subject matter *blah blah blah blah blah*." ¶ Obviously in the punk-rock and hardcore community, it's become a bit of a visual cliché because everyone wants to have a gritty-looking album that is kinetic in some way. But a lot of them are missing the point, you know? They're just sort of using it for a decorative purpose, and they're not really capturing the kinetic and powerful energy and equality of typography or a specific visual.

Why do you think you're drawn to this textural, ominous imagery?

I think it's the community in a lot of ways. The community makes its own sort of aesthetic, and being somebody who's been actively a part of the community for so long, you end up creating things that are of that aesthetic. People see stuff that is successful with that kind of approach with a textural feel or something that's kind of dark and sort of somber, and they go, "That's what I want." Sometimes there's a little bit of non-originality in there, and my job as a designer and as an artist is to sort of attach the substance to their work, inject a little bit into their project. ¶ [Laughs] I can't remember how many *Jane Doe*-influenced al-

bums came out after that record was created visually. People started showing them to me on a regular basis. "Hey check this out! Doesn't this look familiar?" It was flattering, but it was a bit insulting because a lot of the people were artists. You go, "Hey I know your work. I know you can do something that is as interesting as this and is as powerful as this. Don't lift from me!"

Seeing as how *Jane Doe* has been replicated so many times, have you ever wanted to rebel against that style?

Definitely. For my own band, specifically, we did that with the last record [*You Fail Me*]. We wanted to be as minimal and as dark and as striking as possible. We didn't want a record that was going to be visually intense like *Jane* was. *Jane* had a lot of energy behind it. It was abrasive, but it felt like a bit of a visual rollercoaster ride at times, whereas with *You Fail Me*, we wanted a record that would be stark and cold and barren and be the complete antithesis of what *Jane* was. That was a bit of visual rebellion, but it still serves the same purpose. It's still iconographic; it's still powerful. If anything, it's *more* powerful. It tells the same kind of visual story that other Converge records do, but does it in a much more minimal manner. That was the intent with that album: to tie the visuals and the lyrical prose together along with the actual musical mood of the album.

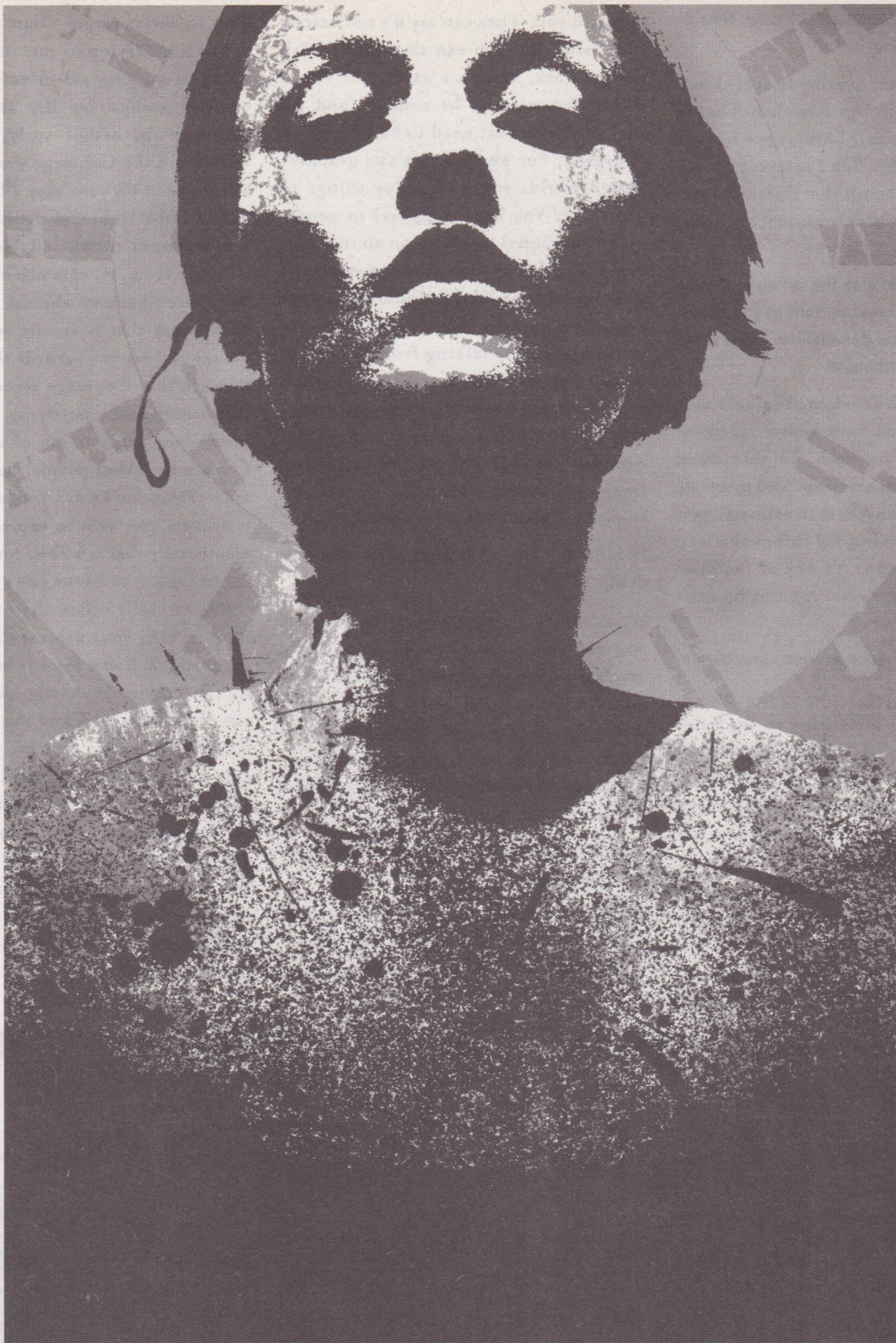
What did you have in mind with making *You Fail Me* fit the album's title and content?

The record is essentially about hope; it's

about healing wounds. If you unfold the CD version of the record, you'll notice it works in a reverse storyboard, where the wounds actually bleed a sort of textural heart pattern slowly throughout the piece, and on the cover the wound is healed, essentially just scars at that point, and the record's essentially about that; it's about taking responsibility for actions and about emotional healing. It's about growing up. It's about living with misfortune and living with failure and trying to overcome that—facing those demons—and I think that visually it's a metaphor on that. I didn't really want it to be this really striking piece with a whole lot of imagery. I just really wanted to sort of hit it home with that and just concentrate on minimal imagery. I think it really worked. I really enjoyed that record.

On *Jane Doe*, you made some of the lyrics in the album art illegible, but on *You Fail Me* the lyrics are readable.

They're completely straightforward and they read as one large story. That was completely intentional to go along with the theme of just a really unified, simple album. If anything, I wanted this album to be understood visually . . . I didn't want people just to go [shifts to a perky voice] "Oh it's a really neat-looking record! I wish our record looked like that!" Fuck that. I wanted them to think and maybe take away some substance. Sadly, substance has been missing from this community for so fucking long. I wanted people to hopefully read for once.



I can't remember how many Jane Doe-influenced albums came out after that record was created visually. People started showing them to me on a regular basis. "Hey check this out! Doesn't this look familiar?"



Consistent throughout your work is a very rich, very textured, splattered-paint theme. How do you arrive at that look?

I build all my textures using India Ink and spray paint and things like that. They're physical; they're real. I always get e-mails from people saying, "Oh I'm trying to create a Photoshop brush that does what you do." But it never works because it's not created that way.

You've said before that the artwork for the record is every bit as important as the music, which isn't a typical perspective. For a lot of bands, it's an afterthought.

You have so much freedom. You have musical freedom, you have lyrical freedom, you have visual freedom. To take those three independent art forms and uniquely package and present them in refined way is one of the most powerful things that can exist in my opinion. It's one of the most powerful art forms ever. A painting can't play music, you know?

Do you see a difference between graphic design and fine art?

When you create something in the fine-art world, it is what it is, and it's either as emotionally complex or as emotionally barren as you say it is. No one can argue with you because you're the one who essentially created it and that's it. So if you say that this big white square on a black canvas is about "the oppression of some sort of third world country and their economic status" or "this is about the gentri-

fication of city a, b or c," no one can argue with you. They can say it's not exactly successful, but you can say it is. ¶ With design work, there's a variety of visual issues that need to be resolved and visual problems that need to be solved and answered. For example, in the graphic-design world, you have many things to overcome. You have to appeal to people on an emotional scale and on an intellectual scale. You need to answer a variety of visual questions. If the album has a specific title, and the band wants your artwork—and this is talking from my world, by the way, not the general world—then they want the artwork to convey a certain emotion. Well, I need to convey that emotion through the use of color and imagery with typography. I need to create something that is what they want.

How do your fine art projects differ from your design ones?

With fine art, you're expressing yourself and yourself alone. You have a specific emotion or specific subject matter that you want to visually get out there. That's where you immerse yourself, and that's what you're *creating* versus trying to just *package* somebody else's creation. It's a very different place.

But the majority of your work nowadays seems to be album art.

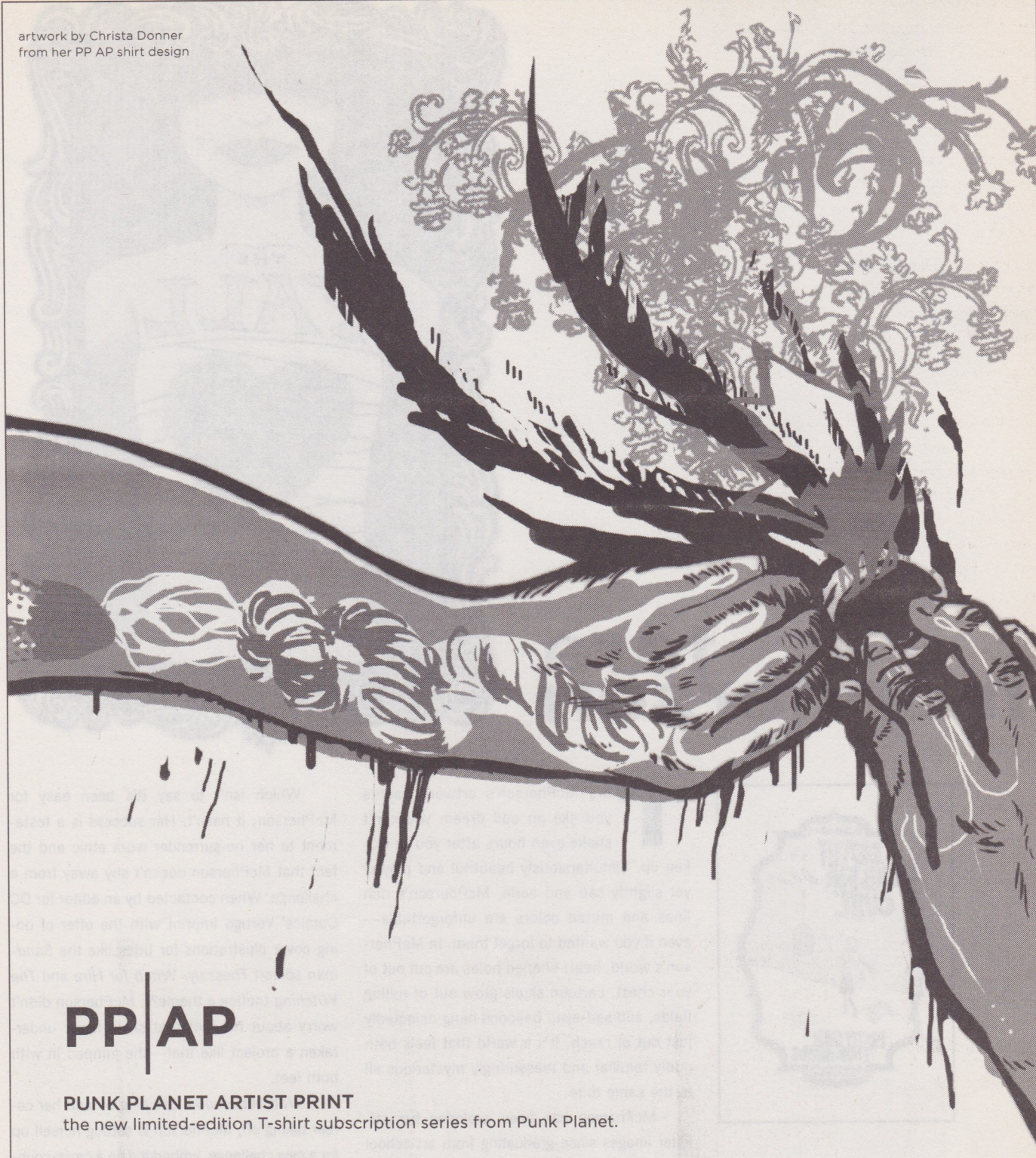
I've been sort of stuck for about two years just doing records. I didn't want to ever become *that guy* and be the guy who's just

known for just doing that. I really don't want to always create album covers. Lately I've been trying to just concentrate on doing more fine art-oriented stuff that revolves around my life and my work. Although the design world, the fine-art world, and the Converge world are somewhat related because they all utilize some of the same technical abilities, there's a very different emotional place where they all come from. At this point, I really feel like there's been an absence in my life of doing work that is emotionally satisfying for me. ¶ Very few records that I work on that are non-Converge records have ever been emotionally satisfying. I really have a very large expectation of the work that I create for other people, but it's not the same thing, you know? You're not creating it because you want to express something emotionally that is within you. You're trying to capture someone else's vision; you're trying to really refine their package, and it's not really your process that you're going through. Some records *have* been emotional for me, primarily all the American Nightmare work and the Give Up The Ghost work—all of that has quite a large amount of emotion attached to it that we at least hoped to convey, and I think that shined through in all of those projects we did together. There's similar projects here and there, but for the most part the other ones are visual jobs; they're me solving a visual problem in a unique style—nothing more, really. ©



I always get e-mails from people saying, "Oh I'm trying to create a Photoshop brush that does what you do." But it never works because it's not created that way.

artwork by Christa Donner
from her PP AP shirt design



PP | AP

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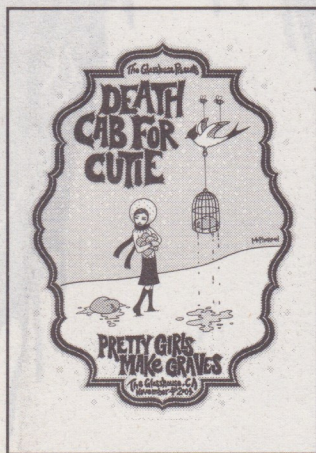
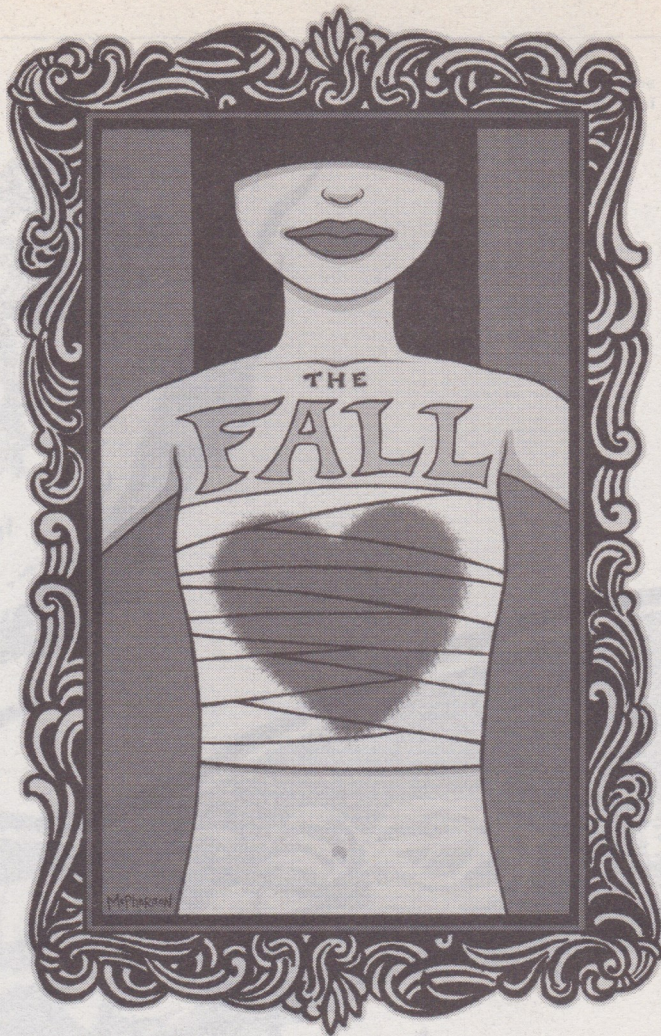
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tara mcpherson



Tara McPherson's artwork haunts you like an odd dream you can't shake even hours after you've woken up. Simultaneously beautiful and playful yet slightly sad and eerie, McPherson's rich lines and muted colors are unforgettable—even if you wanted to forget them. In McPherson's world, heart-shaped holes are cut out of your chest, cartoon skulls grow out of rolling fields, and sad-eyed balloons hang dejectedly just out of reach. It's a world that feels both oddly familiar and reassuringly mysterious all at the same time.

McPherson has been exploring her off-kilter images since graduating from art school three years ago. In that short time, she's made a name for herself in not just one highly-competitive field but three. A successful fine art painter, rock-poster artist, and comic-book cover artist, McPherson is able to switch between these different worlds as smoothly as her lines flow onto a page.

Which isn't to say it's been easy for McPherson; it hasn't. Her success is a testament to her no-surrender work ethic and the fact that McPherson doesn't shy away from a challenge. When contacted by an editor for DC Comics' Vertigo imprint with the offer of doing cover illustrations for titles like the *Sandman* spinoff *Thessaly: Witch for Hire* and *The Witching* (notice a theme?), McPherson didn't worry about the fact that she'd never undertaken a project like that—she jumped in with both feet.

With her artwork catching on and her career taking off, McPherson is setting herself up for a new challenge, embarking on a cross-country move that will transplant her from Portland, Oregon to New York City. It's a move McPherson says she's always dreamed of, and if this dream plays out like her artwork, it'll be one she won't forget.

Interview by **Daniel Sinker**





When I was in art school, I saw so many students get a style immediately, but I felt lost because I didn't force a style. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I was scattered. But by the time I knew what I wanted to do, I had built up my own visual vocabulary.

Which came first for you, paintings or posters?

Paintings. I've been interested in art my whole life. I went to an art magnet school, and I decided to go to art school for college. I started painting there. The posters came way later. I didn't even think about doing rock posters until after I graduated. In college, I wanted to be a gallery painter.

So why did you make the leap into rock posters?

I started doing them for my band—I was an artist and it seemed like it would make sense to make our flyers. The flyers started getting more involved as they went on and people started noticing them. The first venue I started doing posters for was the Knitting Factory in LA. Because I wanted to be a painter, I was totally in denial of my posters at first. I wasn't embarrassed of them, but they were just something I did on the side. I didn't put them on my website or anything. But I did post them on Gigposters.com and I got a lot of great feedback out of that. It dawned on me that this was a really great thing to be doing, and that it was OK to do both. I put posters up on my website and pretty much immediately, the posters got more hits than my paintings did! Now I love doing both.

How do you balance the two?

I usually just go back and forth. I'm not the type of artist that can work on five things at once—I start a piece and I go until it's done and then I move on to something else. I'll work on a poster and when it's finished I'll have a painting job I need to do or a gallery show I need to make work for. It's balanced out for me mentally because when I get sick of one thing, I can switch to another. That keeps me completely interested. But right now I'm in between comic-book covers, so I've booked a

whole bunch of poster jobs. Right now I'm doing poster after poster.

Do you ever start a poster, get halfway through it, and think that it would have made a better painting? Or vice-versa?

It's happened a few times where I'll use the original drawing from a painting and make it into a poster. There's a Blonde Redhead poster that was a painting first and there's a PJ Harvey poster I did that was also a painting first. I really liked the images and the painting sold, so I felt like I should use it again so the image could be out there. I've also done posters that I think would make really cool paintings. But at least lately, once I've made an image for a poster, I feel like I should let it live its own life in the poster and maybe I shouldn't use it as a painting.

It's interesting thinking about the audience for your work, because you work in three mediums that are very distinct: the gallery world, the poster world, and the comic-book world.

I've been doing a lot more comics conventions recently, I go to Flatstock, which is the poster convention, and then I go to gallery shows and it's all different, but they're similar in a lot of ways too.

How did you end up doing the comics stuff?

I was interviewed in *International Tattoo Art* magazine and one of the editors from Vertigo comics read it and e-mailed me. She said "Oh, I hope to find you something really soon." I figured it was going to be six months or a year down the road, but she e-mailed back a few days later and had something for me! It was perfect because I always wanted to work in comics but never actively pursued it. I've always read comics—I don't go for the superheroes so much—and it was a really great transition to move into. It was also great to be sought out.

It's funny because the comics work you've done compliments your style so well.

Yeah, it's kind of perfect, huh? [Laughs.] It's a real collaboration working with my writers and my editor.

There is a really consistent base of images and tone to your work, no matter what medium it's in. It's rare that you see a piece that feels like it doesn't fit in with your other work. What is it about this type of imagery that is so appealing to you?

When I was in art school, I saw so many students get a style immediately, but I felt lost because I didn't force a style. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I was scattered. But by the time I knew what I wanted to do, I had built up my own visual vocabulary. Now I don't even have to think about it; if I have to illustrate something, it just pops in my head how it should look. Now it happens naturally; it's second nature.

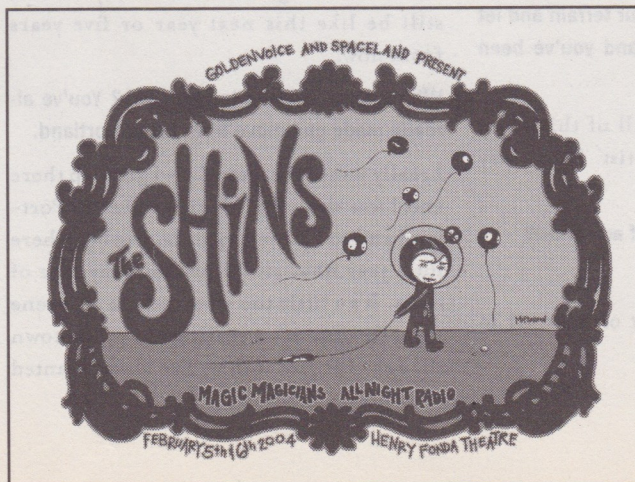
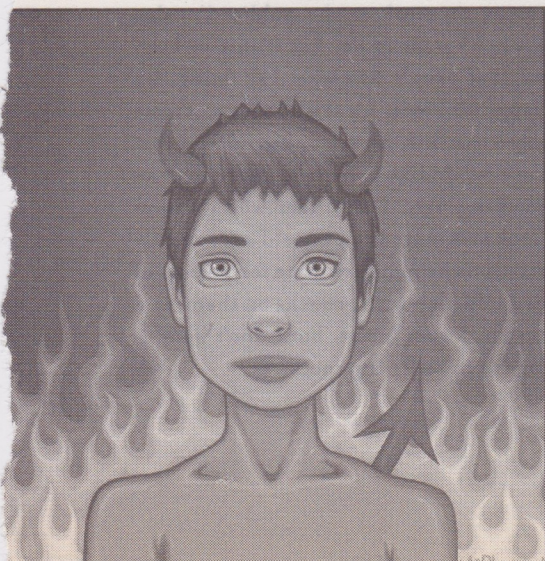
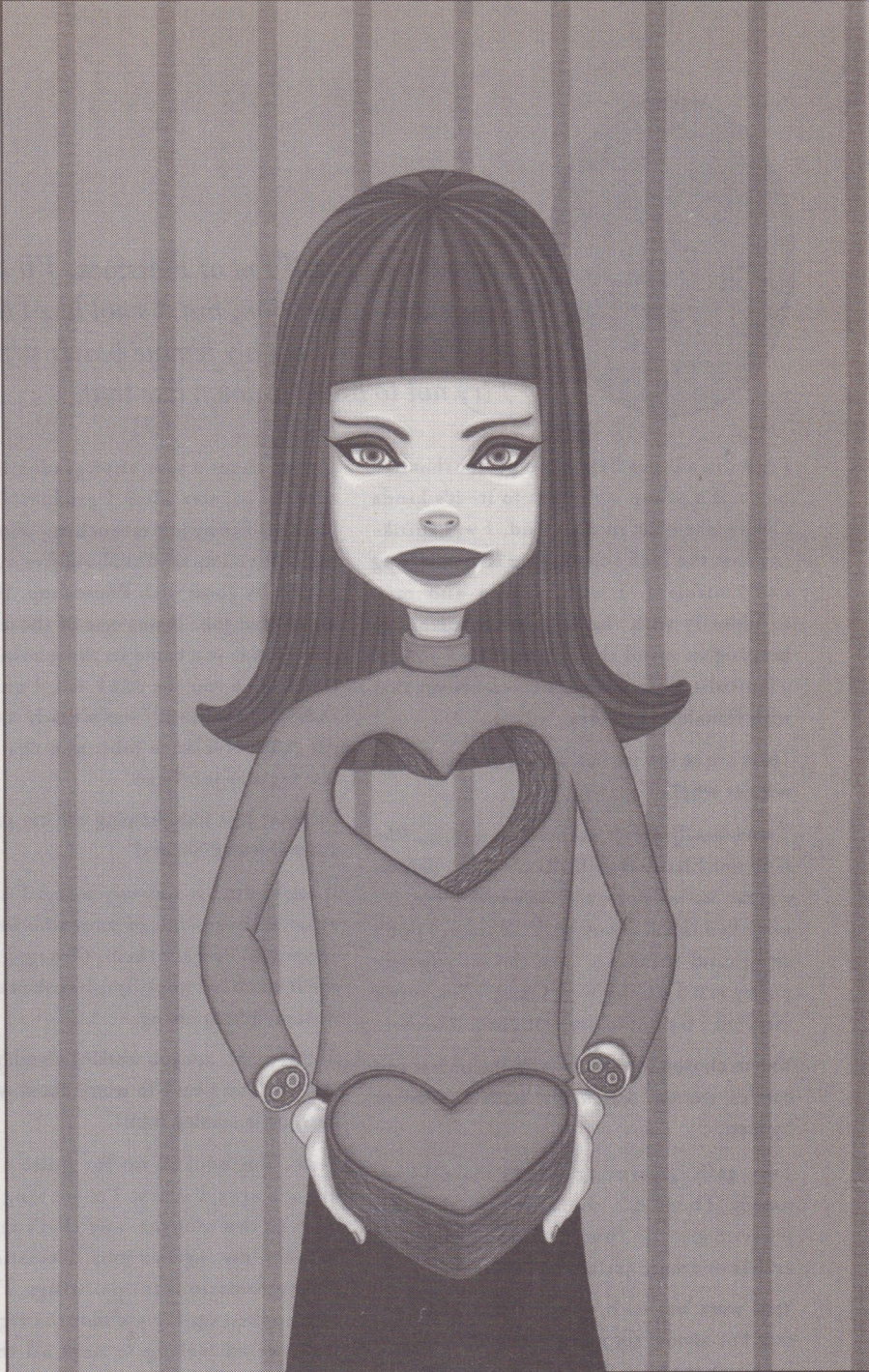
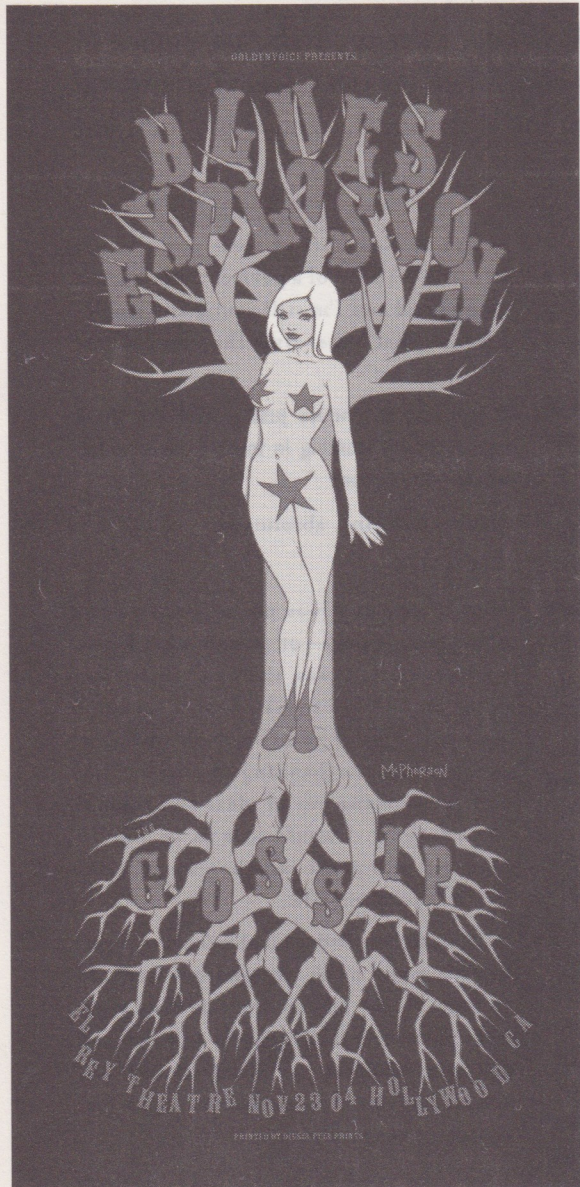
Your imagery walks a fine line between being cute and creepy. How do you maintain that balance?

I want it to be subtly unnerving. Even if it's cute and innocent and sweet, I want it to be just a little unsettling.

Why?

I think life is that way. It's a reflection on the complexities of the situations life puts you in.

One thing I think is unique about your poster work specifically—though I think it corresponds to your comics work too—is that your depictions of women are so different than the work of your poster-making peers. Your stuff is a far cry from the big-titted devil girls of Coop, for instance. Are you making a conscious effort to create a different portrayal of femininity in what is a very masculine scene?





Sometimes, like if I'm at Flatstock, I'll think, Whoa, there are only two women in this whole convention, but it's not like I think about it all the time. I don't sit around thinking, "I'm the only female poster artist on the West Coast." Yes, it is a fact, but I try not to break it down like that.

I just did a Blues Explosion poster that had more of a pinup style look to it—it's kinda cheesecake—but in my mind, I was thinking that the look she's giving is very strong and confident. I want women and men to identify with the female character, so keeping in mind that I come from sort of a feminist background. I try to convey that with female characters.

There are so few women postermakers. Do you wonder why?

There really aren't many. Sometimes, like if I'm at Flatstock, I'll think, *Whoa, there are only two women in this whole convention*, but it's not like I think about it all the time. I don't sit around thinking, "I'm the only female poster artist on the West Coast." Yes, it is a fact, but I try not to break it down like that.

You've chosen to work in both the poster and comics worlds, which are both dominated by men.

Even gallery painting is very male dominated. There are more female painters percentage-wise than compared to poster artists or comic artists, but still.

Your work has such a feminine quality to it that I'm almost surprised that you're held in such high regard in these worlds. You don't try to step up and "out macho" the dudes' stuff. Instead, you've staked out your terrain and let your work speak for itself—and you've been very successful at it.

It's crazy. I didn't expect all of this when I decided to become an artist. I feel very fortunate.

How long have you been out of art school?

Three years now.

When were you able to rely on your art to make a living?

It took about a year after graduating. I assisted a painter after I graduated, then I had this funny job retouching photos for a headshot company for about five months—I got really good with Photoshop. [Laughs.] I hated that job. It was one of those kind of jobs that if you came in three minutes late they'd give you the stink eye. I quit out of sheer desperation. I was already starting to get more freelance jobs, and that was the last regular job I had.

Did that feel like jumping off the plank into shark-infested waters?

It totally did. It was very scary. I'd call up other artist friends of mine who were more successful and ask them, *Oh my god, what did I do?* It was hard work, but I worked a lot, and it started happening.

At this point, are you working steadily enough that you don't have to worry about where the next job is coming from?

Yeah, I'm booked up for quite a while—but it's always scary. I'm moving to New York in two months, and that's scary, but between my regular jobs, freelance stuff, and commissions for paintings, I'm actually booked up for six months right now. It's a weird feeling to have all this stuff planned out so far ahead, and it's still nerve-racking, 'cause I worry if it'll still be like this next year or five years from now.

Why are you moving to New York? You've already made one move from LA to Portland.

I really wanted to leave LA—I grew up there and I was sick of it. My sister lives in Portland and so I moved up here. I've been here for a year now, and it just isn't my type of town. It's a little too slow and the art scene is really tiny—it's a really good music town though, I'll give it that. I've always wanted

to live in New York at some point in my life, and it's kind of a perfect time: work is going good and I'm still young and single; I figure what better time than now to just do it—so I am!

If you had to choose just one of the three worlds you're working in to do forever which would you choose?

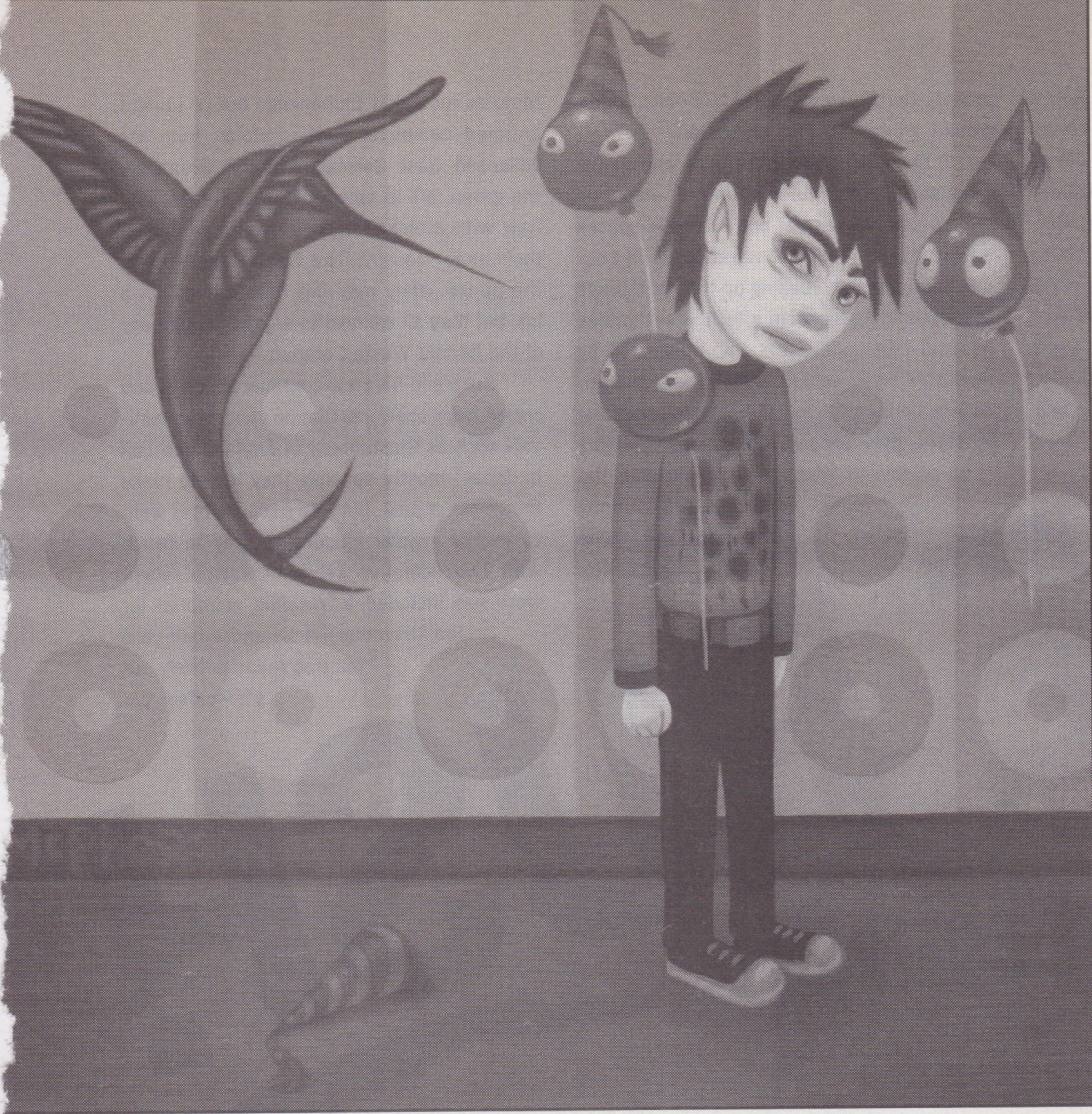
Gallery painting, absolutely.

Why is that?

Maybe because it was my original dream going into college—or at least what I discovered once I was there. I really love painting. When I think of art, I think of painting. Part of painting is the drawing part of it and the thinking and the writing and the working out of ideas and themes and concepts. I would love to be able to hang out and paint and show in galleries for the rest of my life.

Wanting to do paintings that will show in galleries is pretty much why everyone wants to go to art school, but not everyone three years after graduating is showing in galleries and getting commissions and living off their art. What do you think it is about your work that connected so quickly?

I have no idea! [Laughs.] That's the part where I feel really lucky. I'm not really catering my work to the public—I'm doing what I want to do, but it just so happens that people like what I'm doing. It's a happy accident, I guess. I like to create images that I think are beautiful and that people would like to own. If I were to draw something ugly, I'd wonder why I'd want to look at it more than once! I see some illustrations people have done for posters of weird, old men with growths on them, and it may be a cool image, but I don't want to hang that in my living room. ©



© DC Comics/Winnco



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Founded by Joe Rush and Robin Cook in 1984, the Mutoid Waste Company was a group of itinerant punks and squatters that threw gigantic underground parties at sculptural installation sites in Europe during the 1980s and '90s. As elements of the punk scene became more commercialized, and unfortunately more violent, some punks sought the spirit of grassroots community, novelty, and

honesty that Rush and Cook's mobile underground art events often embodied.

Influenced by both the punk and hippie movements, the Mutoids hosted elaborate events, creating surreal and futuristic spaces in abandoned industrial warehouses in London and ultimately loading up their entourage in exodus to Amsterdam after the authorities had run them out of the UK. Influenced by Mad-Max style welded vehicles and the anarchist notion of living without governmental masters, they became notorious for setting up parties in Western Germany with the music group 2000DS. Among their brazen, wild acts, the

Mutoids recreated Stonehenge out of upright armored personnel carriers stolen from the collapsed East German military. Eventually the group left to wander Spain, France, and Italy with a nicked MiG fighter jet as part of their motor convoy. The Beats, the hippies, the punks—they may not have agreed on a lot, but they all seemed to enjoy the company of the Mutoid Waste Company.

Rush and his crew continue to sculpt and create large-scale installation spaces for festivals such as Glastonbury in England and Fuji in Japan, mostly because they love to make things out of junk, but also because they want to inspire regular citizens to stay in touch with their creative selves. Rush's recent work has included a traveling memorial for Joe Strummer—a six-and-a-half-yard tall tree made entirely out of welded car

JOE RUSH

MUTOID WASTE COMPANY

mufflers and an enormous recreation of Strummer's guitar flying out of the top. He's also traveled to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where he helped local youth turn relinquished AK-47s into sculptural works, creating a giant bird whose feathers were made of the charred metal of super-heated machine guns.

I first met Rush at his October 2004 sculpture show in East London and was enchanted by the finesse with which he is able to craft found objects into fantastical beasts, as well as his ability to tell extremely colorful stories.

Interview by **Justin Hamacher**

photos by **Dominic Huber**

How did the Mutoid Waste Company come about?

Well, after the punk thing started to fizzle and die, through 1978 and '79, it was less and less good and more difficult to do anything. It got more violent in all the clubs. There was this traveling movement in England which started off from the festivals, and I think was partly related to Ken Kesey's

Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test—it was an English version of this. What happened was there were these festivals going around, one of which was at Stonehenge, and all these travelers were coming and doing the festival. After a few years, they'd all bought themselves old buses and trucks to live in and it became a huge anarchist convoy of vehicles traveling from one festival to another. It was completely anarchist and completely illegal, but too vast and chaotic for the police to be able to deal with it, or stop it, even though they tried. ¶ I left London and I ended up being one of the first two punk rockers to walk onto this scene, onto this whole hippie, free-love, traveling anarchy scene. I traveled with them for over a year and then I realized that what we were doing wasn't good enough: We were having parties *on* people, not *with* people. We were arriving as hundreds and hundreds of people in trucks to



a beauty spot, setting up and then having a party that local people—people that really didn't know what we were doing—felt excluded from. When it came down the road, it looked like the most brilliant show you had ever seen in your life, but really when it was set up, it was just a lot of people getting out of their head and taking drugs and talking shit. I felt like we could do something better than this, that we could do a show that, when it pulled in, could actually blow people away, and totally entertain all different types of people. So I went back into London and, over the next three or four years, slowly started to put my thing together. ¶ By 1985 had built this giant truck that looked like a skull and we went out on the road as the Mutoid Waste Company, and started out traveling with all our mutated sculptures on board and our more punky attitude, a little bit more crisp in style and everything. But that was the same year that the peace convoy finally got smashed by the police and by Margaret Thatcher. As people would try to get to Stonehenge in their vehicles, they road-blocked them and drove them into a field. Then the police just attacked all the people in the vehicles and smashed the shit out of everyone and smashed all

the vehicles up—they even beat women up. It was a total travesty. The whole thing was pretty much blacklisted from the British news. Even reporters who tried to report on it were beaten up. It was a totally evil thing that happened. It was Margaret Thatcher's whole show in full power.

They totally destroyed the convoy?

Yeah. So what happened was we started doing these inner-city parties where we were squatting big industrial premises with our trucks and turning the whole of the inside area into this mad world, with cars hanging upside down, floods we had caused that ran out of the warehouse where we would build rivers and bridges and graveyards all out of metal. Big dancehalls where we'd invite everybody in. And because all the traveling people had had their vehicles smashed and destroyed, they were coming to the parties as well. You'd get these extreme cross sections of characters from these mad, wild people out of Mad Max, also the London clubby crowd, the London soul crowd, and the funky reggae crowd, and of course people into the art. We also had all the art crowd and the middle-class intellectual crowd, so we suddenly had a situation where we could mix more crowds than anybody had ever done, you know right in the middle of the city and nobody really knew who was a Mutoid and who

wasn't. We wouldn't say anything, because obviously

what we were doing was totally illegal. In the end it was a lot of fun; we did that in London for about three years.

What were some of the ideas behind all this?

Mutation, and also living in a state of constant change and learning to be able to be comfortable in the knowledge that even if your whole situation changes, you will be able to adapt and survive. Rather than trying to make such a solid position in your life that nothing could change it, and then when of course it does change—like in recent the tsunami—suddenly you haven't got a leg to stand on. What we're saying is to be comfortable and in a state of constant change and flux.

So your artistry was born pretty much through the necessity of your lifestyle: moving about, being adaptable, and taking it as it came?

Absolutely, yeah.

Sometimes it seems like there was some hostility between punks and hippies. How do you rectify that?

Well, I think a lot of hippies are hypocrites, you know, about who they are. They can be quite fascist about their thing. But you know if you're talking about the punk thing, when it originally came out, it came out at the end of the hippie thing. ¶ In the original punk thing, there was Johnny Rotten singing about no future, and everyone's going on about no future. But what you need to be reminded of is that the generation that became punk rockers, from when they first were four or five years old—when they were first old enough to know what's

WHAT WE'RE SAYING IS TO BE COMFORTABLE AND IN A STATE OF CONSTANT

going on in the world—the first thing they were told was that there was an imminent destruction going to go on and we were all going to be blown to pieces by nuclear bombs. At any moment this fight was going to go off between the East and the West. So punk came about at a time of thinking that at any moment they were going to be destroyed. Also, it was a time when the hippie thing, that had been so full of utopian dreams of changing the world, had become a parody of itself. All these rock bands had become so huge that they were making concept albums and living in palaces and castles in Scotland. It had become a parody of itself and it was clear it was false. So, the punk thing came out of that. ¶ But, in actual fact, punk was a very optimistic thing. It was optimistic and funny. It was irreverent and was trying to upset people, but it was funny. It was a humorous thing. It was only really after Sid Vicious died, and the way that he died, I think a lot of later punks have taken on this idea that the way to live was just to fuck yourself up. But the real punks, they didn't think like that. For us, Sid Vicious dying like that was a disaster. It was a great sadness. It wasn't an impressive way to go, like a great rock'n'roll suicide. It was a disaster.

The work of yours that first caught my eye were your bronze casts of fantastical animals I saw on display in London that artist Damien Hirst had commissioned. They have a very real sense of motion to them that one doesn't always see in sculpture assembled from junk and scraps. I especially liked the prehistoric running bird sculpture. How did you come into contact with Damien Hirst?

I came into contact with him through Joe Strummer. Joe and myself both come from West London. We knew of each other for years, but it wasn't until three years ago at the Glastonbury festival we bumped into

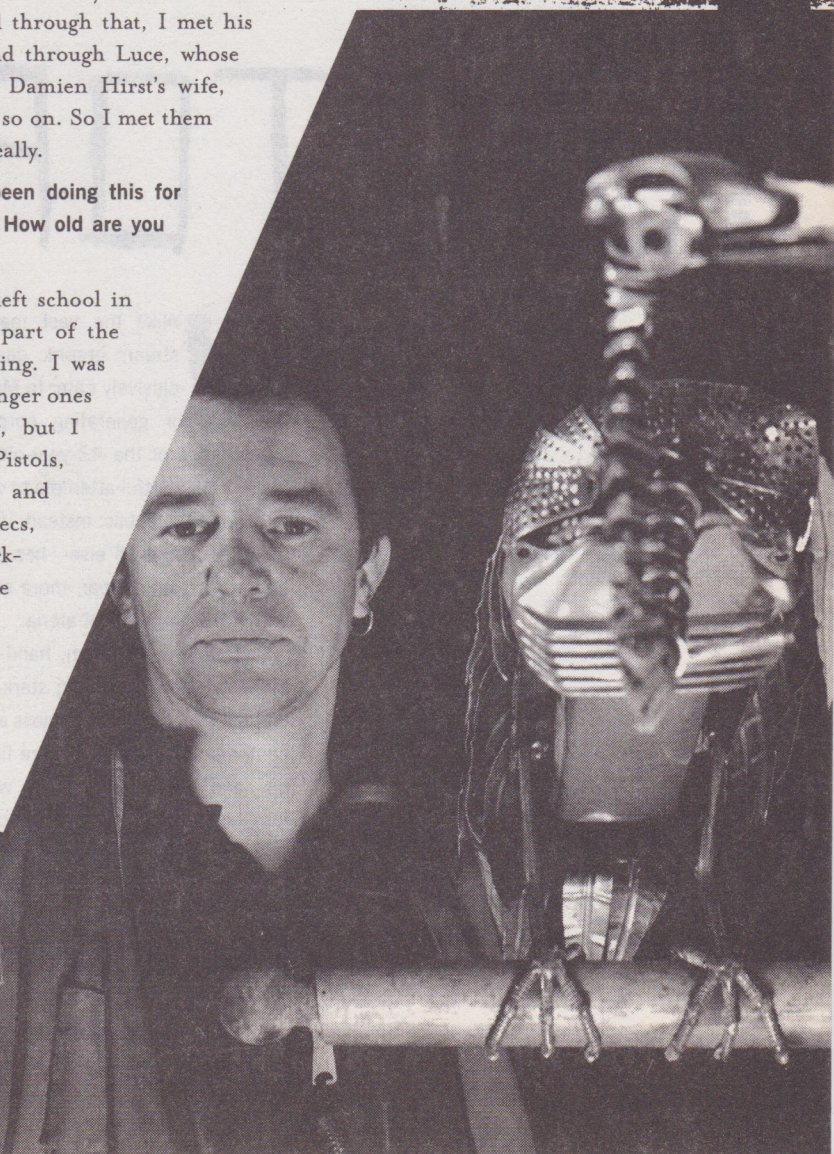
each other one morning around a fire, and we worked out who each other was, and we had the most brilliant, brilliant conversation. We talked about what he'd been through and what I'd been through and the merits of the way he'd done it and the way I've done it. We found out that we really liked each other and we were feeling really good about meeting. We wound up working that summer in Japan on this area in the Fuji Rock Festival where my crew and I built this giant ant eating a car and he was running a fire with karaoke in the middle of the night for all the bands and people. We had a really good time. He died that winter, and I built this huge tree at Glastonbury festival out of exhaust pipes, mufflers, and from the top of it we built a giant version of his guitar with all his stickers on it, his Stratocaster with huge wings and the neck sort of turning into this bird and that was flying off the top of the tree at about six yards high. It was vast and the whole thing was basically dedicated to the memory of Joe. Funny enough, it was exactly the same spot where I had met him the year before. It was very odd. And through that, I met his wife, Luce, and through Luce, whose best friend is Damien Hirst's wife, and so on and so on. So I met them through that really.

So you have been doing this for over 20 years. How old are you anyway?

Forty-four. I left school in '77, so I was part of the early punk thing. I was one of the younger ones in that thing, but I saw the Sex Pistols, The Damned, and the X-Ray Specs, and the Lurkers. They were good times. I'm from

London, so as soon as I got thrown out of school I just started going to the punk clubs. Part of what I do grew out of the hippie traveling movement and I sort of fused the two lifestyles to create my own thing. ©

CHANGE AND FLUX.



**"LISTEN, I AIN'T YOUR DAD, BUT
YOU KNOW THIS IS GONNA COME
BACK AND BITE YOU IN THE ASS.
SOMEONE'S GONNA CALL YOU
OUT ON THIS. AT SOME POINT,
SOMEONE'S GONNA SAY, 'WHERE
DO YOU DRAW THE LINE?'"**

james VICTORE

Unlike the vast majority of mainstream graphic designers who exclusively cater to Madison Avenue's demands for generating corporate revenue, the prestige of the 43-year-old James Victore doesn't lie in artful attempts to visually entrance or deceive the public. Instead, Victore—a poster designer, above all else—has built his reputation stirring up deeper, more significant issues within the commercial arena.

Employing a rough, hand-scribbled, often dirty style that stands in stark contrast to the omnipresent digital cleanliness and exactitude of contemporary design, Victore first cut his teeth on—and has since become widely esteemed for—his topical work, whether commissioned or produced independently on his own dime.

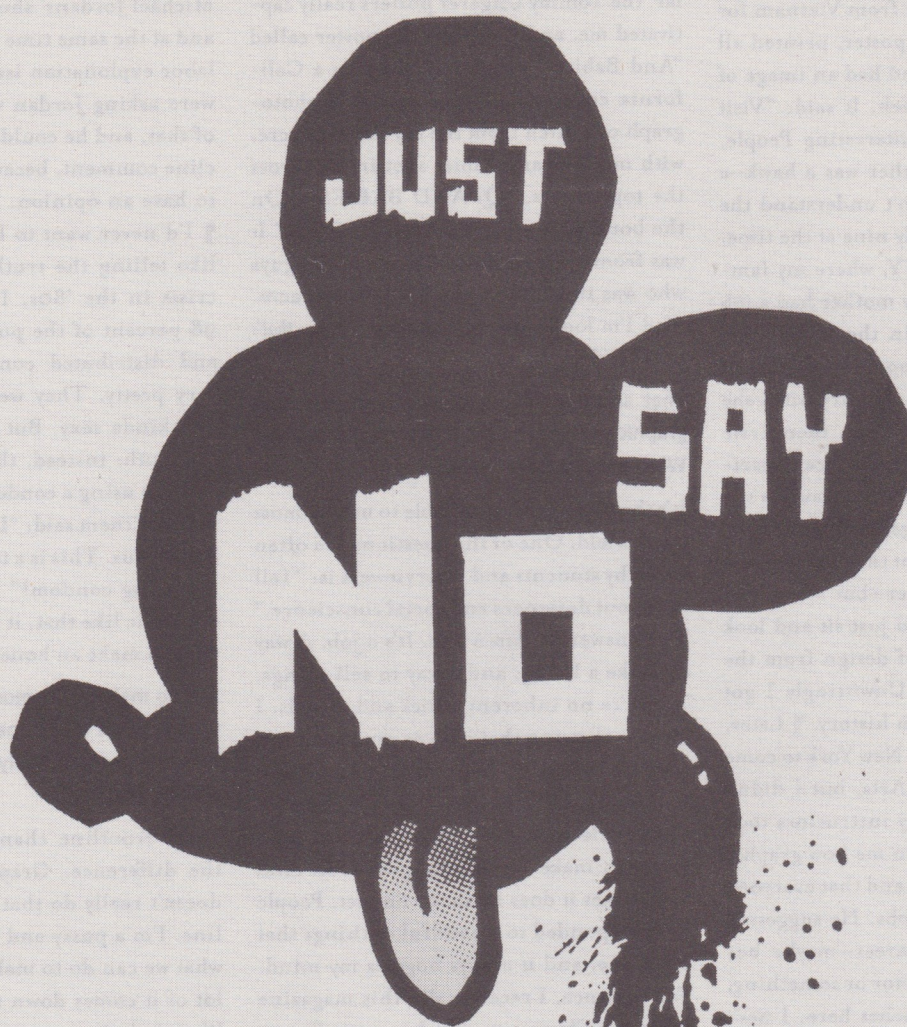
While he's been commissioned by clients such as *the New York Times*, MTV, Moët & Chandon, The Portfolio Center, and various

book publishers for an array of covers, some of Victore's self-produced posters—such as a decapitated Mickey Mouse with his tongue fully extended—have been widely reproduced and appropriated worldwide, both on street walls and in gallery exhibitions.

In a Hillman Curtis's short documentary of Victore's work, the dissatisfaction and zeal of a generation of young designers is voiced by Victore: "That work—the socio-political stuff, the cultural stuff—that is what graphic design is for. That is it used at its best. Not to sell socks—though it's good at selling socks. Graphic design is a big fucking club with spikes in it, and I want to wield it in its pure, strongest, fullest potential."

Victore was interviewed by phone during a break in classes at the School of Visual Arts in New York, where he teaches.

Interview by **Jon Resh**



How did you become a designer?

I was brought up in the military during the Vietnam War, and the first poster I ever really had an encounter with was a piece that my father brought home from Vietnam for me. It was a fake travel poster, printed all in camouflage colors, and had an image of Marines storming a beach. It said: "Visit Exciting Places, Meet Interesting People, and Kill Them." My father was a hawk—a military guy—so he didn't understand the irony of it. I was probably nine at the time. ¶ Also, in Plattsburg, NY, where my family eventually settled, my mother had a job at the state university, in the library. We lived outside of town, so I would finish school and go wait in the library until she got off work a few hours later, then drive home. She worked in the reference department and knew that I liked to draw, so she would pick out these huge design annuals. She didn't even know what they were—it was just a picture book to her—but she would feed them to me. I would just sit and look through these annuals of design from the '40s through the '70s. Unwittingly I got this major lesson in design history. ¶ Later, when I was 19, I moved to New York to come to the School of Visual Arts, but I didn't last very long. One of my instructors took me aside and explained to me how graphic design was very difficult, and that everyone was looking for paying jobs. He suggested that I choose another career—maybe become a CPA or ski instructor or something. I left school. He still teaches here. I never use his name when I tell that story. He doesn't remember the advice he gave me. ¶ Back then, I thought graphic design was just making menus and stuff. I had a part-time job at a ski shop, which was kinda how I put myself through school, and upstairs from the ski shop was this antique bookstore. I went upstairs and some of these books that I had seen when I was 11, I'm now looking at again at 19, and the stuff is just speaking to me. I was like: *Oh my god*. At school, we were learning about Joseph Albers color theory, and grids and typography, but there's none of it in this book. Everything in this book swings! And everything we're talking about

in school is really boring, so what the hell. I looked elsewhere. ¶ I also started paying attention to more of the anti-war stuff, work that had real passion and guts. In particular, the Tommy Ungerer posters really captivated me, and there was the poster called "And Babies," which was done by a California collective. The poster is a photograph of a ditch from the My Lai massacre, with mothers and babies shot in it. Across the top, it says, "Q: AND BABIES?" On the bottom, it says: "A: AND BABIES." It was from an interview with one of the guys who was involved in the My Lai massacre. And I'm looking at it thinking: "Now *that's* graphic design."

That seems in line with your assertion that graphic design is "a big club with spikes in it." What exactly is that club?

It's the power that's available to us that most don't wield. One of the questions I'm often asked by students and interviewers is: "Tell me about designers and social conscience." The answer is: *there is none*. It's a job. A way to make a living, and a way to sell things. There're no inherent ethics and morals. I choose to swing that club as much as I can because I think it's important to see graphic design used at its best. I get a kick out of the intellectual gymnastics that you have to do to make something powerful. And sometimes it does seem to connect. People have responded to a handful of things that I've done, and it always boggles my mind. For instance, I recently did this magazine cover for *Chronogram*, and I just got five e-mails from complete strangers telling me how I've hacked into something or spoke to them. It's very weird, but ultimately it's what I'm always shooting for. I always want that real human interaction.

How effective do you think graphic design can be in bringing about social change, if at all?

I think it could be very effective, but I think for the most part it's not allowed to be. For Amnesty International, where we actually have an audience, we'll get the message out and speak to the right people. But, for instance, I had an opportunity to do a full spread for the MTV Music

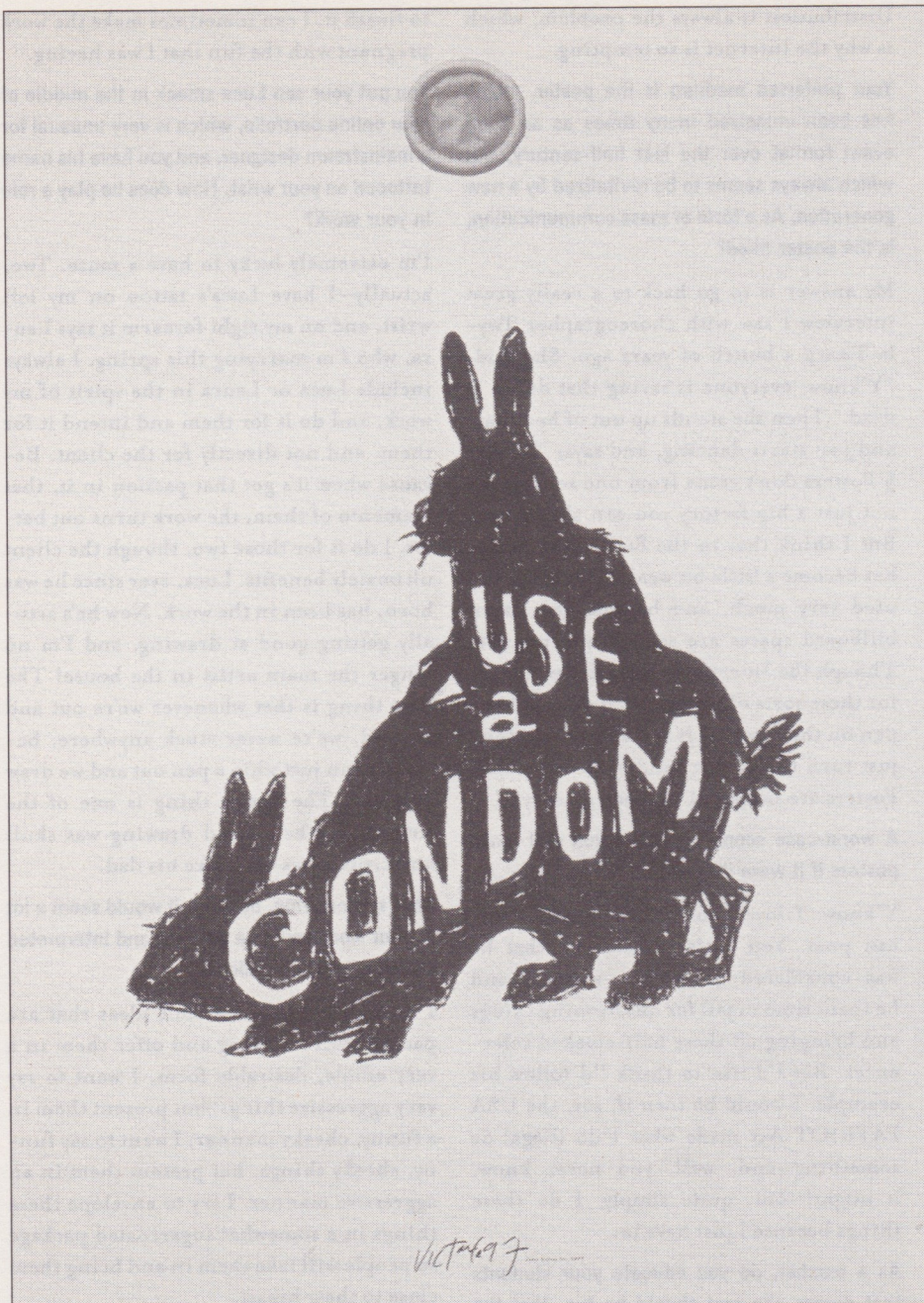
Awards, and make something completely unbridled, and things like that always get pulled back—because people can't afford to tell the truth. It reminds me of when Michael Jordans' shoes were very popular, and at the same time Nike had their child-labor exploitation issues. The newspapers were asking Jordan what his opinion was of that, and he couldn't say. He had to decline comment, because he couldn't afford to have an opinion. He'd lose either way. ¶ I'd never want to be in that position. I like telling the truth. During the AIDS crisis in the '80s, I was baffled because 98 percent of the posters that were made and distributed concerning AIDS were very pretty. They were nice photographs and kinda sexy. But none of them spoke the truth; instead, they showed sexy allusions to using a condom, making it stylish. None of them said: "Listen, this is fucking dangerous. This is a terrible situation. Use a fucking condom!" When we were in an epidemic like that, it seemed like the right time to make an honest statement.

But no matter how much a poster or piece of visual design tries to persuade, isn't it still up to the viewer to actually do something to make a difference?

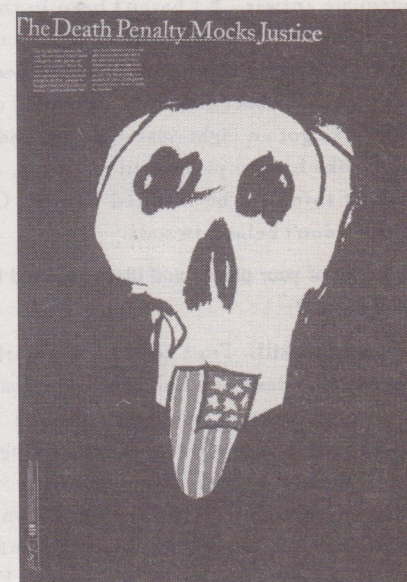
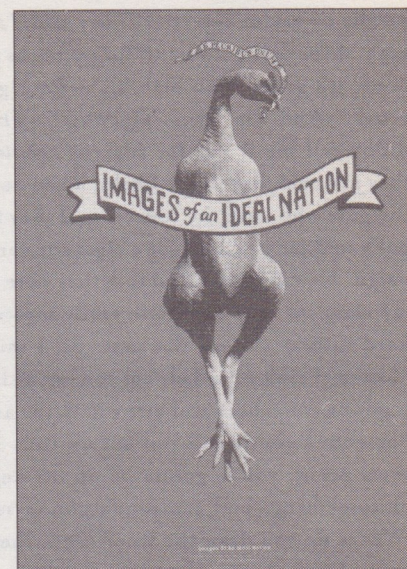
Yeah, frontline change really does make the difference. Graphic design by itself doesn't really do that. I'm not that frontline. I'm a pussy and I know it. But we do what we can do to make change happen. A lot of it comes down to talking to people. We can do it one-on-one, or I can make a poster and have something of a conversation. I'm not a social worker, I'm a graphic designer. And again, I'm a pussy!

So do you find yourself in that old classic dilemma of your commercial needs and ambitions conflicting with your social conscience?

Actually no, I really haven't. But this issue has come up recently. A group of students that I taught five or six years ago were in a position where they're now hiring other people. They called me and said, "Hey, we need some mad Photoshop skills, give us some phone numbers of people." I gave them a bunch of names, and I saw those



"ONE OF MY INSTRUCTORS TOOK ME ASIDE AND EXPLAINED TO ME HOW GRAPHIC DESIGN WAS VERY DIFFICULT . . . HE SUGGESTED THAT I CHOOSE ANOTHER CAREER—MAYBE BECOME A CPA OR SKI INSTRUCTOR OR SOMETHING."



people a week or two later. They said: "Ah yeah, we're doing this stuff for 50 bucks an hour, it's great, blah blah blah—for cigarettes." And I'm like: "Cigarettes?!" They didn't tell me it was for fucking cigarettes, they just said they needed help. Then I saw the guys who were the source, and they finally told me it was all for a cigarette campaign. Now keep in mind that they were in my class, so they had done really topical, hard-hitting shit in the past. So I said: "Listen, I ain't your dad, but you know this is gonna come back and bite you in the ass. Someone's gonna call you out on this. At some point, you're gonna be up on stage or something, and someone's gonna say, 'Where do you draw the line? Or is there even a line?' And you're not gonna have an adequate answer." ¶ I haven't been in that situation yet. I'm not sure what I would and wouldn't do right now; I haven't been asked. I drink beer and wine, so would I do that? I've got an eight-year-old boy, and I don't like him to partake in fast food, so I don't think I'd be involved in that. Or soda—I don't believe in soda.

Are a lot of your pieces and ideas rejected by your clients?

I'm used to kills. I'm a realist and a working graphic designer, and that's a big part of the profession. But I do continue to shoot myself in the foot as far as making a lot of money. I think I scare clients more than anything else. They don't know what to do with me, or what to expect. So while I may not die with \$50 in my pocket, I'll have had this role of the guy on the outside who constantly says: "Yeah, but does anyone really need that? Is that really right?"

With the higher profile of graphic designers lately, does it seem possible to you that a designer could achieve the activist status, influence and appeal of, for instance, a figure like Michael Moore?

Yeah, I think a designer could. I think they'd have to have the proper backing though, like, for example, Amnesty International or the Soros Foundation. If Michael Moore didn't have Miramax, his movies wouldn't have been so effective.

Distribution is always the problem, which is why the Internet is so tempting.

Your preferred medium is the poster, which has been eulogized many times as an irrelevant format over the last half-century, but which always seems to be revitalized by a new generation. As a form of mass communication, is the poster dead?

My answer is to go back to a really great interview I saw with choreographer Twyla Tharp a bunch of years ago. She said: "Y'know, everyone is saying that dance is dead." Then she stands up out of her chair and just starts dancing, and says: "Look!" ¶ Posters don't come from one source; it's not just a big factory you can shut down. But I think that in the States, the poster has become a little bit weak because it's not used very much, and because the damn billboard spaces are so wildly expensive. Though the Internet is a great new source for these sorts of things, what doesn't happen on the Internet is accidents. You don't just turn the corner, and boom—it's there. Posters are supposed to sneak up on you.

A worst-case scenario: would you still make posters if it were illegal?

Y'know, I love Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet. You gotta understand that he was considered dangerous—a poet!—and he spent time in jail for questioning things and bringing up these half-cloaked references. But I'd like to think I'd follow his example. I would be torn if, say, the USA PATRIOT Act made what I do illegal or something—and, well, you never know, it might!—but, quite simply, I do these things because I just have to.

As a teacher, do you educate your students that design can and should be fun, that the effort is worth it for the joy alone?

Oh yeah, I think that idea comes through all the time. We constantly talk about it: if it isn't fun, you're not doing it right. There has to be some spirit, some enjoyment, out of the process. What I really do for a living is sit at a big desk with pen and paper and make myself laugh. And if I really work hard at assembling the thing, going through all of these intellectual exercises

to finish it, I can sometimes make the work pregnant with the fun that I was having.

You put your son Luca smack in the middle of your online portfolio, which is very unusual for a mainstream designer, and you have his name tattooed on your wrist. How does he play a role in your work?

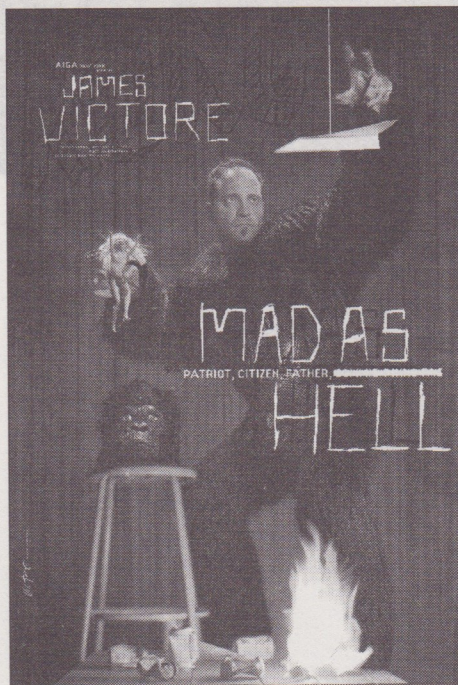
I'm extremely lucky to have a muse. Two, actually—I have Luca's tattoo on my left wrist, and on my right forearm it says Laura, who I'm marrying this spring. I always include Luca or Laura in the spirit of my work, and do it for them and intend it for them, and not directly for the client. Because when it's got that passion in it, that memento of them, the work turns out better. I do it for those two, though the client ultimately benefits. Luca, ever since he was born, has been in the work. Now he's actually getting good at drawing, and I'm no longer the main artist in the house! The neat thing is that whenever we're out and around, we're never stuck anywhere, because I can just whip a pen out and we draw together. The funny thing is one of the first things he started drawing was skull and crossbones—just like his dad.

That's interesting, because it would seem a lot of your work could be enjoyed and interpreted on some level by children.

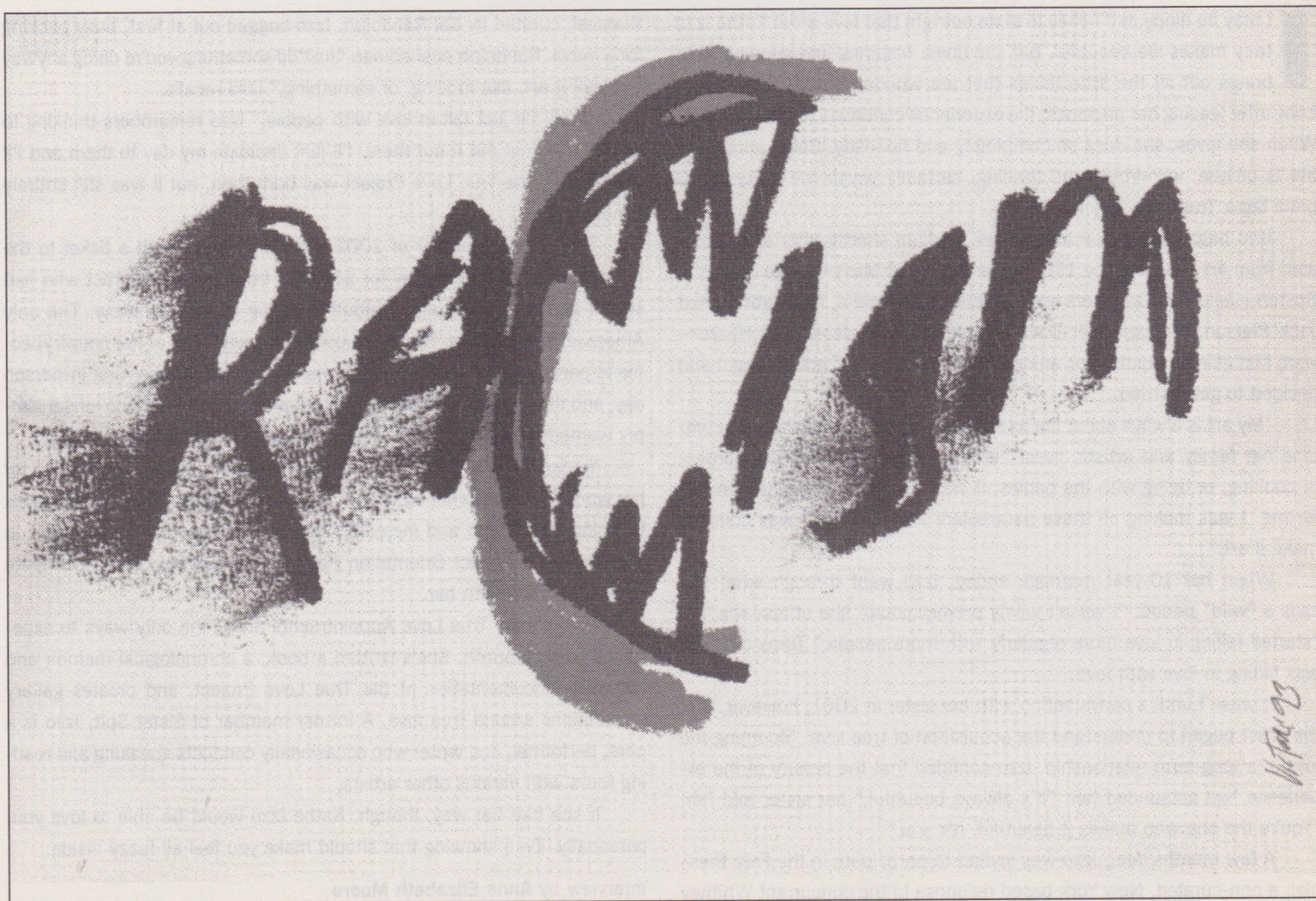
I do want to take difficult ideas that are packed with meaning and offer them in a very edible, desirable form. I want to say very aggressive things, but present them in a funny, cheeky manner; I want to say funny, cheeky things, but present them in an aggressive manner. I try to envelope these things in a somewhat sugarcoated package so people will take them in and bring them close to their breast.


Do you think your best work is ahead of you?

As a 40-year-old designer, I'm trying to kick the shit out of the work that was done by me as a 30-year-old designer. By my age, we tend to glom onto one thing that works, then play it out until we're forced into retirement, which is really not interesting. I wanna always keep changing, and I've always been completely happy to risk failure to do so. ©



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Kathe Izzo

It may be dippy and hokey to state outright that love artist Kathe Izzo truly makes life beautiful, but she does: Inspiring and genuine, Izzo brings out all the little things that are wonderful about the world. Long after leaving her presence, the experience continues to feed the soul. When she loves, she does so completely and honestly. Being adored by her is unique, wondrous, and thrilling; certainly worth the hefty \$500 price tag a True Love Day bears.

Izzo began using true love as her medium shortly after she graduated from art school in the 1980s. Her friends at Mass College of Arts in Boston—fellow life-as-arters photographer Nan Goldin, installation artist Jack Pierson, photographer David Armstrong, and dealer Pat Hearn—were fast gaining reputations among the elite when Izzo got pregnant and decided to get married.

"My art is always about life as art," she says of her decision to combine her family and artistic lives. "Whether I was working the garden, or cooking, or being with the babies, it was always a conceptual project for me. I was making all these parameters around what I was doing to make it art."

When her 10-year marriage ended, Izzo went through what she calls a "wild" period. "I wasn't wildly promiscuous," she offers; she just "started falling in love more regularly with more people." Turns out, she was falling in love with love.

It wasn't until a conversation with her sister in 2001, however, that the artist began to understand the acquisition of true love. Mourning the loss of a long-term relationship, Izzo confided that the beauty of the experience had astounded her. "It's always beautiful," her sister told her. "You're the one who makes it beautiful. It's you."

A few months later, Izzo was invited to participate in the Free Biennial, a non-curated, New York-based response to the concurrent Whitney

Biennial, curated by Sal Randolph. Izzo begged out at first, busy packing for a move. Randolph pushed her: "Just do something you're doing anyway and call it art, like moving, or something," Izzo recalls.

"Well, I'll just fall in love with people," Izzo remembers thinking to herself. "I'll just put it out there. I'll just dedicate my day to them and I'll love them." The True Love Project was born then, but it was still entirely conceptual.

Then in the summer of 2002, Randolph purchased a ticket to the Frankfurt Manifesta on eBay for \$15,000 from a German artist who had sold it as his conceptual contribution to the invite-only show. The only American with a ticket, Randolph used it to invite 250 of her countrypeople to participate in her Free Manifesta. There, Izzo did her first in-person day, and the True Love Project finally became tangible. Izzo no longer simply wanted to put more love into the world: she wanted to love *you*.

Yet to do so as a full-time job, the artist would need to charge for her work. The somewhat arbitrary—and often flexible—\$500 price "feels both incredibly high and incredibly low to me," Izzo explains upfront in the True Love Project Orientation Package her patrons/clients complete before their day with her.

Fortunately, True Love Appointments aren't the only ways to experience Izzo's warmth. She's written a book, a chronological memoir and historical documentation of the True Love Project, and creates gallery installations around true love. A former member of Sister Spit, Izzo is a poet, performer, and writer who occasionally conducts speaking and reading tours with various other artists.

If she had her way, though, Kathe Izzo would be able to love you, personally. Even knowing that should make you feel all fuzzy inside.

Interview by **Anne Elizabeth Moore**



4-20-04 HUDSON



4-05-04 NYC



7-22-04 NYC

What is the process of a True Love Day?

I do a lot of hanging out. Definitely the specifics of each day are different, but even the best-laid plans usually go awry and we end up walking, or sitting and talking, or eating and talking. The activities become less important. There's a lot of talking. Sometimes I hate that. I've been trying to push silent days, because I feel like that would be really, really intimate, but that hasn't happened yet.

Why has it been difficult to push for silent days?

The thing is that I like to talk. The intimacy is great with the talking. I really do believe that what I do has become an art form, but I have had to learn the technique of not pushing my imprint of what I think of love on the experience, but letting the person come out to me. A lot of that is talking, and I don't think there's a problem with it, but it makes me feel a little bit like I've eaten too much sugar. I love the stories, but I don't want it to be about the writer in me that collects the stories. I want it to be a genuine intimate experience. And I think it cuts off . . . like, if there was to be a sexual connection, it kind of cuts that off.

Do sexual connections happen frequently?

There have been a couple sexual connections. One I think that was totally genuine, chemically, coming from both of us, and then other times it sort of comes from one person or the other. But there are very few. Not that I want more sex. I mean, I really don't care if there's sex or not, but I just feel like the talking becomes . . . we just get stuck there, and that's kind of easy. It keeps it from going deeper. ¶ Actually, I just bring up sex because that's a natural place where you notice the tension, but it's there even without sex. Like in silence, or awkward moments. There's a lot of intimacy there. It's like if you get into bed with a friend, especially if you're younger, and you think, "Well, we should just have sex." But if you just have the sex, it's because there's an awkwardness between you, and you just have the sex to get busy. But if you actually just sleep in the bed with somebody, and it's so uncomfortable and awkward, it's so much more intimate. I do have those times, but I'm such a yakker, and I get people all excited and they want to know about the project and then they tell me about their love lives. I think that's great, but I think it's a little bit of a rut.

It sounds a little like you're trying to change people's notions of what love might be.

My theory is that there are energetic transactions going on all the time, whether or not you're conscious of it. I have this idea in my installations, because I do installations around love, that if I spend a night in the gallery with somebody I love, now, we could leave in the morning but when the people come to visit the gallery, there will be this energy residue from the love and they will be able to experience it there, even if they don't see anything. So [a part of the project is showing people how to] appreciate what might be seen as the slighter energetic transactions of love as being as valuable as these cataclysmic connections and erotic obsessions.

And you only have a day.

The thing is that if you get really quiet—not just quiet, sound-wise—and you really pay attention, magical things happen. [For

example] when I was in Wales, I was doing an installation. Sometimes these installations involve me being in the space with people I know already and love, and sometimes I'll be in an installation in a gallery and I'll be open for appointments. They won't be full-day appointments, but I'll be in the installation for two weeks and people can come in spontaneously and just have a True Love Moment with me. It can last 10 minutes, it can last an hour. ¶ So this guy in Wales was really nervous, and I could tell immediately that he was expecting me to be some sort of prostitute. He understood that it was an art thing, but he was this awkward man. He wasn't really sleazy, but obviously really wanted to be touched. He asked me that really early on, "Does this involve some kind of physical touching?" and I said to him, "I can't touch you, because I don't feel safe around you." It was just my immediate reaction. Whether or not I wanted to touch him, I could have just fluffed my way through. I mean he was gonna leave in a half-hour or something. But I just thought, I would not be loving him if I touched him and went against what I felt, or I would not be loving him if I just was like, "Oh, no, I can't touch you because I'm an artist."

There are tons of legitimate excuses not to touch him.

Right. I said, "What I feel coming from you is so overwhelming for me that I can't touch you, but I can sit here." He'd asked me to sit on the couch with him, I sat across the room from him. ¶ And he said something like, his neediness always pushes people away, and I said, "If you wanted me to touch you right now, would that be love? No, I don't even know you. You came in here in need and expectation. You can hire a prostitute, you can go to a massage parlor, you could get a legitimate massage, but that's not love. And that's not what I'm here to do." But I was just winging it, Anne. I had spent most of the True Love Project avoiding that situation. At the end I did hug him, and he was just lonely. We talked about his loneliness and it was just so intense. That would have never happened if I hadn't been honest. ¶ And that's just an example, of, like, half an hour or 45 minutes, where so much love took place.

It strikes me that people in traditional loving relationships wouldn't be able to address things with that much honesty. There's so much possibility in deciding that this is a short-term experience.

I have to say, without being self-aggrandizing, that as much as I put myself out there in a pop culture way, that that is something. All of my promotion, a lot of my writing is very humorous. I have to have a personal assistant. No one can talk to me before their appointments. When I come in, it's like I'm Elvis or something. So I'm really funny about it, but I've been meditating and doing yoga and raising kids for a long time. I'm 46 years old and I'm really, really dedicated to that introspective, living-my-life-with-integrity thing, and that's my bottom line. I didn't realize that when I started the project. ¶ That's why the thing about life as art. I believe that living, loving should be enough. I'm always thinking, like, how am I supposed to raise my kids, have all these relationships and make art? That's too much for any one person!

So you had to combine them.

Yeah. What else am I gonna do for work?

This work gets really misrepresented. It think the biggest misrepresentation is either that it's all about sex, or that I never have sex with people. That's the biggest thing that is gotten wrong.

You must go through a decision-making process to figure out who to love.

Somebody just emailed me yesterday who wants a True Love Day. I usually Google people right away for more information. I don't like to be too interviewy. I don't want it to seem like I only love cute people, or famous people, or whatever. But I also need a little something. I'm pretty intuitive: If in the interaction, there's not that much energy, then I need to find some. I have my techniques, but this guy, I had no immediate feeling from his letter.

Do you feel like you've made mistakes?

Two of the times that I have had sex with people [were mistakes]. One of them I dated afterwards for a while. I don't think that was a mistake. It didn't last very long. It happened outside the project. I don't think it was a mistake that I dated her; it was a mistake that I let the intimacy of the day get away with me. I later regretted it a little bit because I felt like I potentially harmed the project by not being aware . . . but I learned that the intimacy of the day is so intense, it's so outside of life, it really almost has nothing to do with my regular dating life. It got really messy. Because I ended up not liking her, really, not loving her outside the project. It just confused me about what love was. At the time, I felt like I had finished the project. That I had somehow gotten off track. ¶ And then another person I had sex with when I didn't want to have sex. It was a woman whose identity was very sexualized. She was a very sexual person and she so wanted to have sex with me, I felt like I needed to love her, to have sex with her because she so wanted to show me that part of herself. This was two years ago, you can see how far I've come after dealing with this guy. It triggered a lot in me. Of, you know, having sex with someone you don't want to be having sex with. But I don't regret that, because it's so inherent in what this project is about. It made me look at my boundaries. In the beginning I wasn't so present that my needs had to be met, too. That's something I learned. I was really wanting to please, and I'm not that way anymore. ¶ So both those were probably within the first six months that I started doing in-person days. I also wanted to . . . I wanted to be naughty. I wanted to prove that I wasn't afraid.

Do you have many peers in this mode of working, anyone you can turn to when you come up against something difficult?

What I do is so spiritually based, I'm working on it all the time. I am working on the love phenomenon every minute of my life. The work has become my constant meditation. Whether or not I'm

having a True Love Day, I'm working on these issues. There are probably other people out there that are doing as intense work, but not many.

It's even intense just to hear about. It must be difficult to talk about.

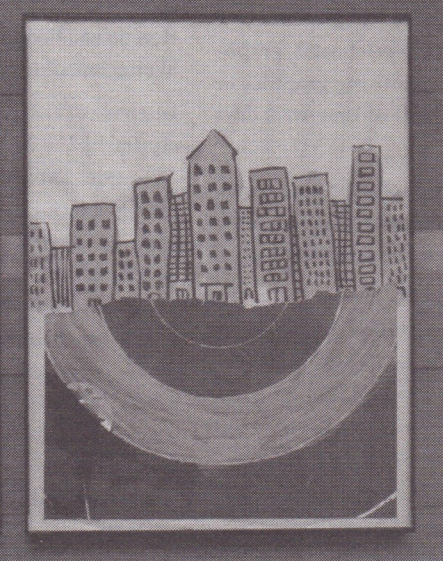
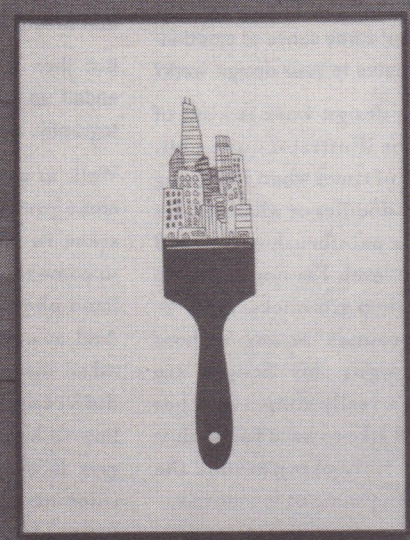
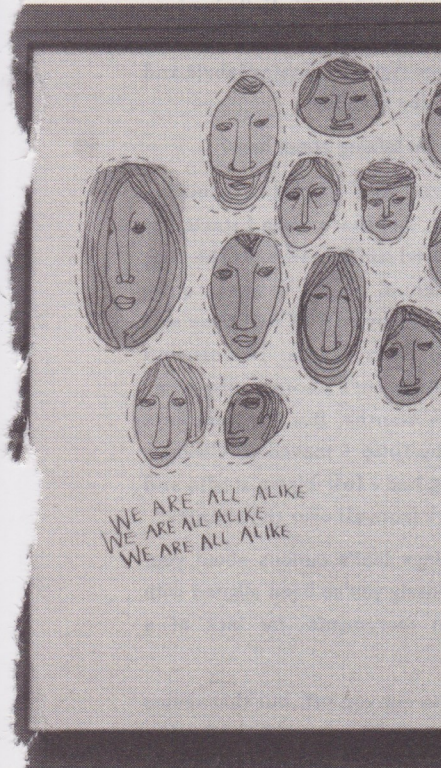
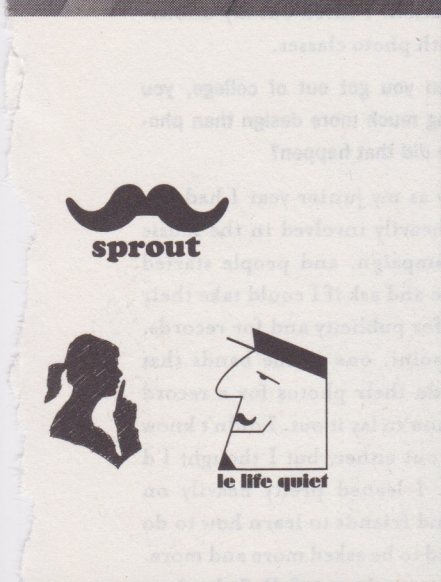
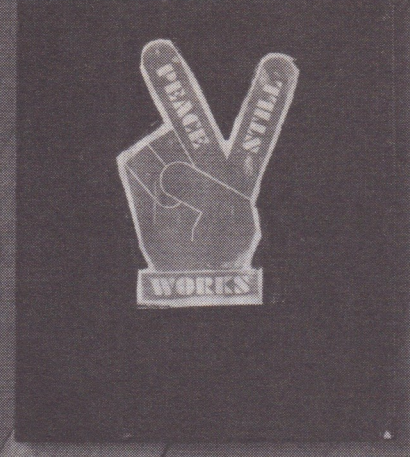
I've been really honest with you, really candid with you, but I trust you. This work gets really misrepresented. It think the biggest misrepresentation is either that it's all about sex, or that I never have sex with people. That's the biggest thing that is gotten wrong.

Well, for a lot of people, sex signifies love.

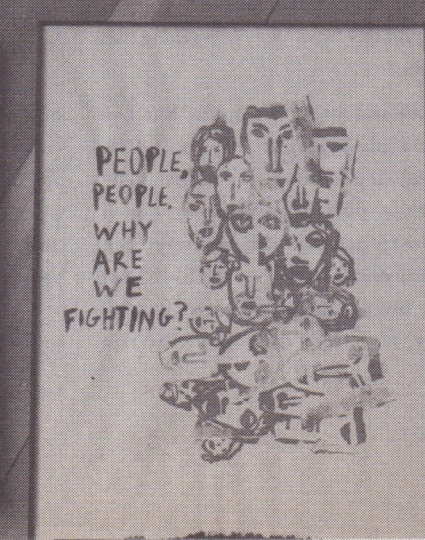
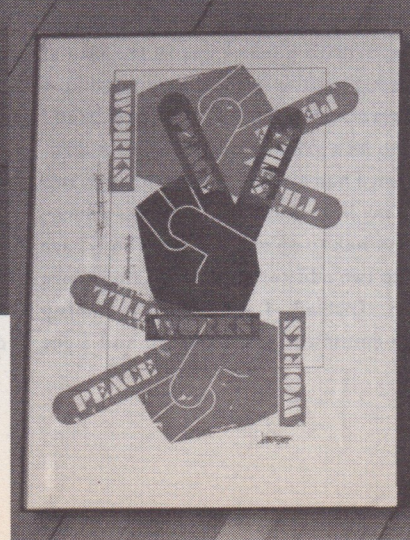
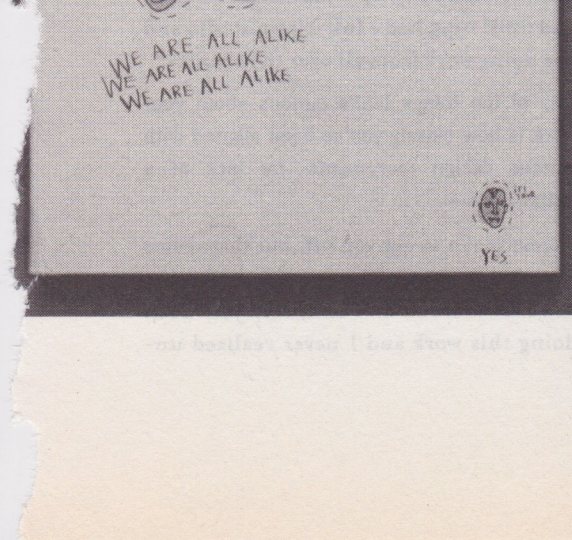
It's true. And there are people that die thinking that's true. I don't really mind that, because what I do is a comment on prostitution and online dating and all the ways that people look for love. So I don't not want that context, but there are times when people are really intense about it. They want something other than what I'm giving them. That's when I get a little schoolmarm-ish and say something like, "Love isn't about me doing what you want me to do." I feel like I have to teach that lesson, but those are people that probably don't even hear me and will never learn. ¶ Some people are really demanding. I once said to this guy . . . he just didn't get what he wanted. It was the end of the day, and he was being really demanding. I just said, "You know, sometimes the way people experience their True Love Days is like a microcosm for how they experience love in their lives. Do you often feel like, no matter what you do you can't get what you want from the people you're in love with?" He was so furious.

I can't even imagine how rewarding your best days must be.

I just did a virtual day yesterday with this 17-year-old girl in Memphis, Tennessee. It was incredible. I'd had this really sad day yesterday, I was not in a good mood, and I was trying to make her not know that I was sad, and I finally told her. I'm gonna read you the last email she sent me, it's so unbelievably adorable and lovely. From 10 to 11 o'clock last night we meditated and she sent me this afterwards. ¶ "Oh, Kathe, I'm sorry you had a sad day. I hope our meditation made you feel better. I feel so much better, disproportionately so. I feel as though every single person I've ever loved threw me a party and spent the whole entire time toasting me . . . I want to share this feeling but I don't know with who, and I don't know how I'd describe it. I think you probably could understand better than anybody. I hope you had it before but if you didn't: here. I love you." ◎



ANDY MUELLER



and made. I experiment a lot, and sometimes things may come out looking a little bit different, but it's still me.

What do you think ties everything together?

If you look at the things that are the most different—my photography and my graphic design—I think they can be viewed as two different bodies of work. But if you look at the subcategories within those genres—like if you look at my graphic design and all of the record covers or skateboard graphics or illustrations or clothing graphics or whatever it might be—all of that work does go together.

I think even your photography and your graphic design has a pretty similar theme. There's a casual vernacular that you approach both of those mediums with.

Yeah, I would agree with that. With all my work—my photography or design or painting—none of it is over-produced. I guess it's a little "outsider" in that way—it's kind of low-brow or reality-based; it's not over-hyped. I own all this photo gear and I have this big photo studio and I have all this technical stuff, and as the years go by I use less and less of it. I'm using simpler and simpler cameras; I'm removing the technical gimmicks that I would have used five, 10, or 15 years ago, and my photography is becoming more and more lo-fi, more honest and simple. In that regard, you're right: the photography and design has the same thematics. But the hangup I was mentioning was with the technical execution of what a photograph is and what a design is—that's where I don't necessarily see the similarities. But maybe that's just not seeing the forest for the trees, because now that you've said that you can see that, I can totally see it too.

What is it about this "lo-fi" way of working that appeals to you?

Well, I never went to art school, but I've been around photography my whole life. My mom and stepdad owned a photo business, it was a portrait company, and I learned how to use everything there. But if I look at my photo career—I shouldn't say career, but my photo *path*—for the past 15 or 20 years, it's funny how much the size

of my photo bag has decreased! I started off wanting all of that knowledge, but now, so many years later, I find myself not caring quite as much about the technical perfection of the image and more about the emotional connection with the image. I find myself getting the most enjoyment from the connection I can have with the person I'm documenting versus trying to have the absolute perfect picture.

How do you think that same sense of emotional attachment translates to your design work?

In that regard the design work is kind of similar. I use Adobe Illustrator quite a bit, of course, but a lot of times when I'm doing my illustrations or doodles or whatever, it's more about using a paintbrush or a pencil and keep it on that level. I'm not one to do any kind of Photoshop gimmicks, crazy 3-D rendered backgrounds, or any of those techy types of designs. My designs are pretty juvenile; it's really simple and has a sense of humor. I like to have fun with it and be looser with it. Looking around the office now and seeing some of my more recent designs, they're very straightforward: they utilize a lot of white space, the photographs don't have any gimmicks to them. The design is almost non-design, it lets the elements speak and doesn't try to be too gimmicky or anything.

You didn't go to art school?

No, I was one of those lost kids in school—I was accepted into the liberal arts and sciences program, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. I thought about being a Spanish teacher, but at the same time, I had a lot of photo experience in high school, and had even been doing a little bit of graphic design. In my free time I was making flyers for a literary club and taking band photos all the time. Within a year I was in the mix of what was happening in the Champaign music and art scene, but by the time I realized I wanted to be a graphic design or photography major, I had already gotten through two years of my liberal arts and sciences education; to switch to an art major, I would have had to do two additional years of their core program. Instead, I ended up switching into the communication college and I got

special permission to be able to take senior-level photography classes in the art and design college.

So what was your actual major?

It's called "Media Studies." It was one of those bullshit degrees that combines a lot of different things, but it was much more on the scholarly side of media without any studio application. I filled out my unofficial minor with photo classes.

But then when you got out of college, you ended up doing much more design than photography. How did that happen?

Well, as early as my junior year I had become pretty heavily involved in the music scene in Champaign, and people started to come to me and ask if I could take their band photos for publicity and for records. And at one point, one of the bands that asked me to do their photos for a record didn't know how to lay it out. I didn't know how to lay it out either, but I thought I'd give it a try. I leaned pretty heavily on roommates and friends to learn how to do it, but I started to be asked more and more. From there it turned into a full-fledged career for me because some of those Champaign bands got signed to major labels and took me along for the ride.

What year are we talking about here?

The commercial jobs started to come up in 1992 or '93, and that's when I started to use the Ohio Girl studio name. By the time I was out of school in '93, it wasn't quite enough money to live off of full time so I went home to Edwardsville, Illinois and worked for my parent's photography company for a few months. But the work kept coming and by 1994 I moved to Chicago and until 1999 had a full-blown studio and was doing work from all over the country.

One of the things that's curious about your work is how closely you've been aligned with various design movements—for lack of a better term—

I don't mean to cut you off, but that seems very funny to me because I feel like I've lived in a vacuum. I've always just been doing this work and I never realized un-

til quite recently that there were so many other people in the nation or in the world doing similar work. It's only been in the last few years that I've realized that I've paralleled some of these movements, but I'm a little bit more on the periphery out there on my own doing it because I loved to do it.

Perhaps it's only dawned on you recently is because as a culture it takes time to connect the dots and be able to say, "Oh, these things all go together."

It's really true. I think what's made me think about this the most is this whole Beautiful Losers phenomenon. It has definitely made me realize that there have been a bunch of other people out there for the last 15 years doing similar things.

I think you can make an even clearer distinction that goes back even before this whole skate/street art phenomenon, because—whether you like it or not—you were one of the people that helped to define the graphic language of emo.

[Laughs.] That's funny. In some ways, I was in the middle of that, I guess, but I can't quite clearly see it. I've never attached myself to any one thing because I'm just having fun visually exploring the world and making as much stuff as I can. There was a while there where I would get this negative feedback about "emo design," and I was always like, *Why are people contacting me about that? I'm just making stuff I like.* I didn't even think about it; it was just right for the time.

Well that is what was interesting about that time, because it was a bunch of people making work that made sense to them, but it just so happened that what made sense to them looked a lot like what made sense to someone else.

Yeah, that's true. One of the records I did back then, Hum's *You'd Prefer an Astronaut*, it's so minimal, and I think of that record as being the beginning of my contribution to that design style. It's such a non record cover. I wanted to let the photos breathe and use some classic type—that's when I fell in love with Helvetica—and use some white space and just simplify everything. I think

the whole grunge movement's design was very heavy and cluttered and I wanted to move away from that.

Just like that neo-minimalist design movement was a group of people that didn't know each other, but ended up using a similar visual style to answer these questions that were in everyone's head at that time, I think that you're involved right now in a similar moment. You mentioned the Beautiful Losers exhibition and book and how it's collected this huge outcrop of people doing work that's similar—everyone's using hand-drawn type and incorporating street-art elements into their design work. Why do you think that style is catching on now?

It's pretty strange. I guess it's the ebb and flow of what happens in culture and in the design world. For me, I just got sick of using computer type and thought I should start hand-drawing things. It's great that some other people have felt the same way.

But it sounds to me like you've never felt like you're a part of a design community.

The way I view it is that I'm this guy who just enjoys making work. That's what I do. I don't talk about it a lot, I just make it. I don't go to design conventions, I just make this stuff and that's it. Recently though I've begun to meet more and more people that are involved in this stuff, and it's been great.

But you did make the move from Chicago to LA and got involved with Girl Skateboards, which is very much a community.

Yeah, I guess it is. I think I always have that problem I mentioned earlier where I can't see the forest for the trees, because here I am with some of my best friends and the most amazing peers and mentors and everything, but I always think of community being away from the home. I look at my office as a second home, and this is where I work with these guys as a full-time crew, and sometimes it's funny how you forget that this is also a community. But sometimes it feels like the five or six of us that work here are in a vacuum. Girl Skateboards is amazing, but it's pretty insular within the skateboard world. Girl is this island of amazing talent and design vision and owners; it def-

initely sort of exists outside of the industry. Maybe that sounds crazy. Obviously, it's a big player in the industry, but it does things on its own terms.

Well, I think that the work that's coming out of the "Art Dump" community at Girl shows a great deal of interplay between everyone. How has being in that environment changed your approach to your own work?

Well, I've *always* been a person that draws and doodles—I have tons of sketchbooks full of type ideas and all kinds of sketches that are more crude and hand-drawn—and before coming here, some of that stuff didn't come out in my work as much as the photography and the graphic design approach. But I started working here in '99 and within a year or two, I started to realize that all this other stuff I do—the analog, hand-drawn stuff—has a home. To me, coming to work here was the best decision of my life. Coming here has taught me to be creative and not to edit yourself or worry about anything. You're allowed to be creative here, which is amazing for a commercial job. About 99 percent of what I make gets produced here. When I look at the Ohio Girl days, or when I talk with friends that work in commercial agencies, you make so much stuff that never gets used. It has to be good work, obviously, but it's wide open creatively. To me it's not so much that I morphed my approach when I came here, it just made me realize that there was a place to let all this other work I'd been doing already to shine through.

I think that has not just manifested in your work at Girl, but your work *period*. You have so many projects going on right now, it's mind-boggling.

I remember someone in '94 or '95 commenting to me, "Andy, you're so lucky that you've figured out what you wanted to do early on." And looking back at that quote 10 years later, it's funny to me because I feel like I really *don't* know what I want to do. But whenever I get that feeling, I just think to myself that I make myself happy when I'm just *doing it*. ☺

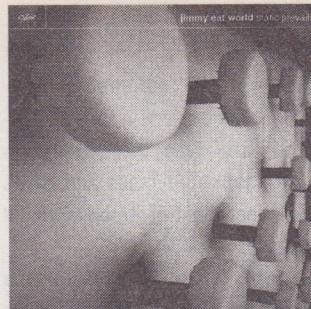
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YOU'D PREFER AN ASTRONAUT



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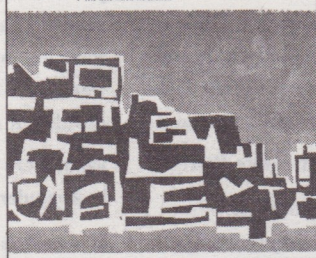
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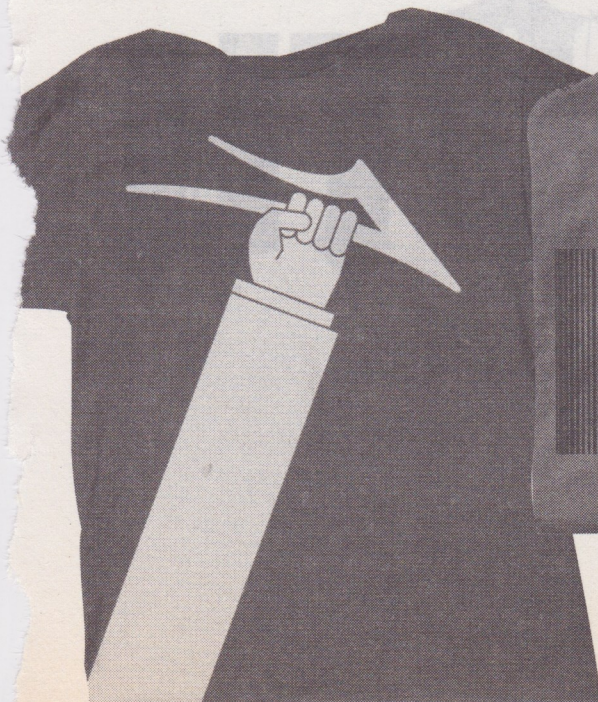


BRAID FRAME & CANVAS

PRC-012



THE WAY I VIEW IT IS THAT I'M THIS GUY
WHO JUST ENJOYS MAKING WORK.
THAT'S WHAT I DO. I DON'T TALK ABOUT
IT A LOT I JUST MAKE IT.



Everyone loves a success story. Not necessarily your got-through-medical-school-and-made-a-ton-of-money variety, rather, the type that oftentimes doesn't have predictable outcomes and exists on the fringes of what most of America would call conventional.

New York-based artist Paul Booth is a perfect example of the latter. Although he engages in all types of art, including painting and computer graphics, Paul is best known for his tattoo work. His tattoos showcase the darker side of human nature that most choose to ignore—let alone have displayed permanently on their skin.

Having combined ink with flesh for the last 16 years, Paul is one of the few in the field who plays strictly by his own rules. Moreover, he's created a niche based on his interest in urges and feelings that habitually go ignored. Sitting triumphantly at the top of the tattooing heap, Paul was pegged "The New King of Rock Tattoos" by *Rolling Stone*, but has stacked up many more (legitimate) accolades on his own by remaining consistently good at what he does, creating a devout group of fans in the process.

With his art proudly displayed on members of such heavy-hitting bands as Slayer, Pantera, and Slipknot, as well as on the covers of Pig Destroyer's *Prowler in the Yard* and Six Feet Under's *Maximum Violence*, you could say the guy is in high demand. Thankfully, Paul had a few minutes to spare at Last Rites, the shop he founded in 1991, and spent them talking to me about his unique tattooing style.

Interview by **Dave Hofer**

You've been tattooing for about 16 years now. How did you get started?

My daughter was born when I was 19 and I got her name tattooed on me. I was totally intrigued and fell in love with the idea of learning how to tattoo. It ended up that I got an apprenticeship with the guy who tattooed me.

What was the appeal—the permanent nature of the work? The pain?

It was the responsibility of, as an artist, putting your art on somebody that's going to wear it for the rest of their life.

Had you been doing art previously?

Yeah.

Had you thought about going into tattooing before this occasion?

The occasion opened my eyes to it. I mean, I was familiar with it, but hadn't thought about it as art until I wore it. Then I saw the possibilities and was totally intrigued.

Were you doing freelance art before that?

When I was a sophomore in high school I had my own business painting denim jackets. It was the old rock days, you know? Then, I got into airbrushing. By the time I got out of high school, I was airbrushing hot rods and bikes.

Was it a difficult transition going from denim jackets to tattooing?

It was a good preliminary for me: The blending and the shading, the intricate

texturing with fanning, I found a way to relate it.

When you were painting jackets and cars, was it the same kind of stuff you're doing now? Were you painting skulls on cars?

Well, it was commissioned work, so it was whatever they wanted. But if it was for myself it was dark.

What led you to that style instead of, say, Japanese art or Sailor Jerry-type designs?

The freedom to explore my style was what developed my style. I was training in a regular street shop. Once I left there, I had the freedom to do whatever I wanted. I had people that were willing to let me explore my art on their skin a bit more. I could draw designs and I got to do some bigger pieces that were totally out of my head. As a result, I gained a bit of a following for what was coming out of my head. As more time went by I had more freedom and I could develop it more.

What were you doing when you were working in a regular street shop?

It was lots of Tasmanian devils and roses and all of that. I don't regret it at all, though, because it gave me the base for what I do now.

Have you always been interested in the dark imagery you specialize in now?

I've always been intrigued with the dark side of human nature and it's always reflected itself in my art. I was a disturbed

PAUL BOOTH



child. As I've gotten older, I've continued to get angrier.

So tattooing hasn't helped you deal with that?

Well, in some ways it has, but I think that I'll always have a chip on my shoulder. But the process is artistic and creative; it's a release, it's venting. My art is my therapy.

Are you ever scared to vent onto someone else's skin?

I've been doing this too long to be scared. You have to be confident to do the job well.

How do you work now? I mean, you're basically The Man when it comes to guys in metal bands or artwork for record covers.

I have a bit of a waiting list.

How long is it?

About two-and-a-half to three years. I'm fortunate enough to have a clientele that gives me an incredible amount of artistic freedom. They want almost whatever I want to do, so I'm able to get into their heads and consult with them and find out what they really want, theme-wise, and do my rendition of what's in their head. I'll get some people that say, "Here's my back. Do whatever you want." Or I'll get people that give me a theme like, "I want something that represents this or that," and

I'll just depict it, get in their heads a little bit and kind of explore their dark side and depict it on their skin.

How do you set up a consultation? Do you go to a bar or something?

No, we just sit in the back room of the shop. After a while, you become a good judge of character. In this art form, you have a responsibility to your client to be good at getting in their head and figuring out what they want. I want people to leave here happy and I want them to feel like they've gotten what they're looking for. I deal with more serious people now; there's really no room for fucking around. People come in off the street and say, "I want Satan on the back of my head," and I'm like, "Why? Convince me as to why, and maybe you'll get it. If you're getting it because it's cool, forget it. If you're getting it because you identify with the concept, OK." It's my job to find that out.

Is that a dying art in tattooing, trying to figure out why someone wants something rather than just doing it?

Oh, no. It's exactly the opposite. In the old days of tattooing, it was more like you would walk into a shop, pick a design off the wall, and get it tattooed on you. Now, with all these kids coming out of art school

and the quality of their art, people are getting tattoos as art. People are taking it more seriously. I see it going more and more in the direction of truly defined as an art form.

Does that make you happy?

Thrilled.

It's not like when a band gets big, and a little part of you dies? Because people want their favorite band to stay unpopular?

You mean like tattooing going mainstream? Tattooing will always be outsider art. It's painful, it requires the ultimate commitment. It'll never be truly mainstream.

OK. I'll admit it: I have no tattoos. That world is a bit of a mystery scene to me. Are there a lot of trends in tattooing?

Yeah, but I see less of it now than I did. There was the tribal trend—that's probably the ultimate example of a tattoo style getting trendy—and that's kind of gone. But now that there are so many different kinds of artists coming into tattooing, there're so many styles and unique directions, that there isn't any one real trend anymore. If there are, it's placement or size. For a while, I saw a trend of facial tattoos: There's the risk of younger people get-

TATTOOING WILL ALWAYS BE OUTSIDER ART. IT'S PAINFUL, IT REQUIRES



ting their faces tattooed without thinking it through properly, because it's a little bit trendy, rebellious. Everything keeps getting more and more extreme. People are chopping off limbs just to chop off limbs! There's that desire to be more extreme than the next guy, for the sake of your own individuality, I suppose.

Are you happy sitting at the top of the pile, or do you feel disconnected from what's going on?

I'm on my own trip, and I enjoy that. I don't really follow magazines much anymore. Not really because of a lack of interest, but because I'm so focused on what I'm doing. I don't want to be too affected by things around me. I'm enjoying staying home more these days exploring my own art.

How did you get involved with doing album covers for bands?

I got asked! A band called Ritual out of New Jersey asked me first. I was friends with them. Then there was Six Feet Under—I was friends with Chris Barnes, tattooing him, and he asked me to do an album cover. If I liked the band, I would do the album cover. Problem is, I hate the record labels. I'm tired of all the political bullshit. I've kind of walked away from the

album cover thing. I'll do it on occasion if it's got any worth. I seldom like being told what to do.

For record covers, do you make the art first, and then say: "You want a record cover? Here you go," or do you listen to the music and say, "This is how this makes me feel."

I require listening to the music. It's funny, because it'll start out with me talking to the band about the album cover, and it'll evolve into my own art. The concept will come from a collaborative discussion, but will take a different form as I explore my own head.

Has anybody ever given you a blank canvas and been dissatisfied with the results?

I don't mean this is in a cocky way at all, but it's rare. Mainly I think it's rare because I'm consistent. You know the extremity of what you're going to get before you get into it. Inconsistency creates a situation where you're not getting what you came for. On occasion, there'll be people that'll slip through the cracks and end up changing their minds. Like I'll outline somebody at a convention—that's not really the right environment to get into somebody's head. There will be more likelihood of regret. For that reason, I've pretty much stopped doing conventions.

If you have a three-year waiting list, what happens when those three years are up? I go in and what?

I'll work on six to 12 pieces at a time, so as I finish a couple, I'll take a couple more on. It takes about a year for bigger pieces. A sleeve can take six months, depending on your ability to travel. I try to schedule people monthly.

Do you ever feel like you're worn out from doing so many things at the same time?

Whenever I feel that way, I cancel my appointments.

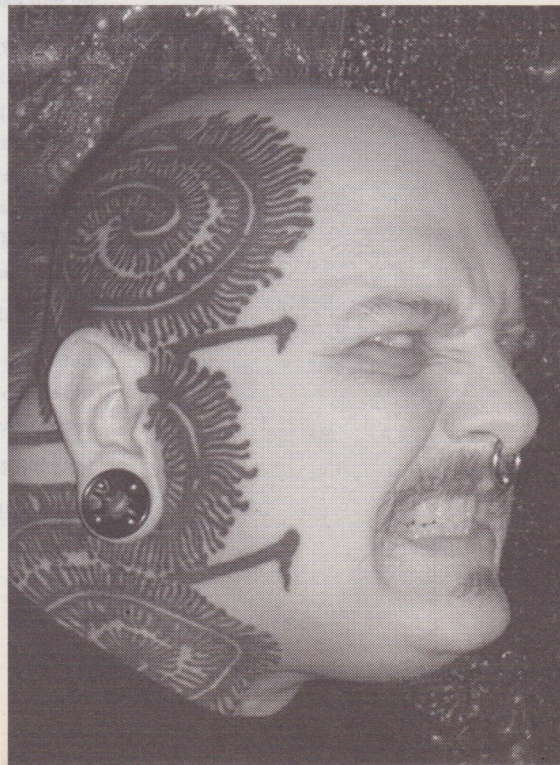
Does that happen often?

No. Over the years I've learned to turn it on and off like a light switch.

Have you ever worried that you're painting yourself into a corner? Like, "Here's another demon!"

For me, no. Not at all. I'm very content with where I am in the sense that I don't feel pigeonholed. I knew back then, years ago, and I know now that you will be pigeonholed when you have a unique style. As I explored the dark side a bit more, I knew that I'd be pigeonholed in that department, but I wanted to be. That's my department. You don't come to me for butterflies and a rainbow. ©

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Fine artist, zinester, and comics creator Christa Donner is quieter and smaller than you'd imagine: Her humungous wall-sized drawings protrude from corners, chandeliers erupting violently from body interiors, shapes spindling wildly into esophageal forms and escaping their owners. Donner's women are beguiling because they are strong, because they retain control of their leaking intestines, because their reproductive organs have lives of their own. The colors used are bold and plain and striking and the black lines that contain them are impassable.

Donner describes herself as comics-obsessed and tough. She's got New York gallery representation and a stint as a Sassy cover model on her resume. It's all a little too much, you might be thinking. I would: The strength of her work alone would scare me if I did not already know I could take her in a fight.

Christa Donner and I struck up a giggly correspondence about three years ago over mutual interests in comics, self-publishing (I've since contributed to her zine, *Ladyfriend*), and art. Since then, we've worked together, played together, and done readings together. We have the kind of conversations we later wish we'd thought to record. Recently, we got together for dinner and I was finally prepared. "I'm just going to leave this tape recorder running while we eat," I told her, "because who ever knows when we're going to be hilarious again?"

"Yes," she agreed. "Who does?"

Interview by **Anne Elizabeth Moore**

Your career is really beginning to take off. How do you like being a famous artist?

I'm enjoying the level that I'm at right now. I don't have to apply to be in shows, which is nice; people invite me to be in things and I have to turn some of them down. And I can pick the ones that are going to pay for shipping, which I never had the luxury of doing before. And I have my own gallery in New York, which is cool.

Which gallery are you with?

Do you want me to spell it into the tape recorder? [*Leans in and spells slowly.*] Krevets-Wehvy.

How did they pick you up?

Their gallery assistant, who's probably similar in age to me, picked up one of my little tiny drawings from a show in Los Angeles at some

emerging artist gallery. She ended up working for Krevets-Wehvy while they were looking for new artists, and she said, "I have to show you this drawing, it's cool." They e-mailed me and asked me to send some work. I sent them some drawings to have in their office, and they sold all of them. Then they said, "By the way, we have this opening for a solo show in three months, do you want to do it?" I was pretty freaked out because it was a very short amount of time, but they sold everything right away and now they represent me. Which means they help me sell things and get into shows and deal with all the paperwork.

Was there much press on that show?

No, it's hard to get press in New York because there are hundreds of shows every week. Oh, actually, there was one very small review in the *New York Times*. I guess that's not nothing.

Did they call you a "comics-inspired fine artist?"

I think the little article said the figures had a comic-book style to them, yeah. That comes up a lot. That's fine.

It is?

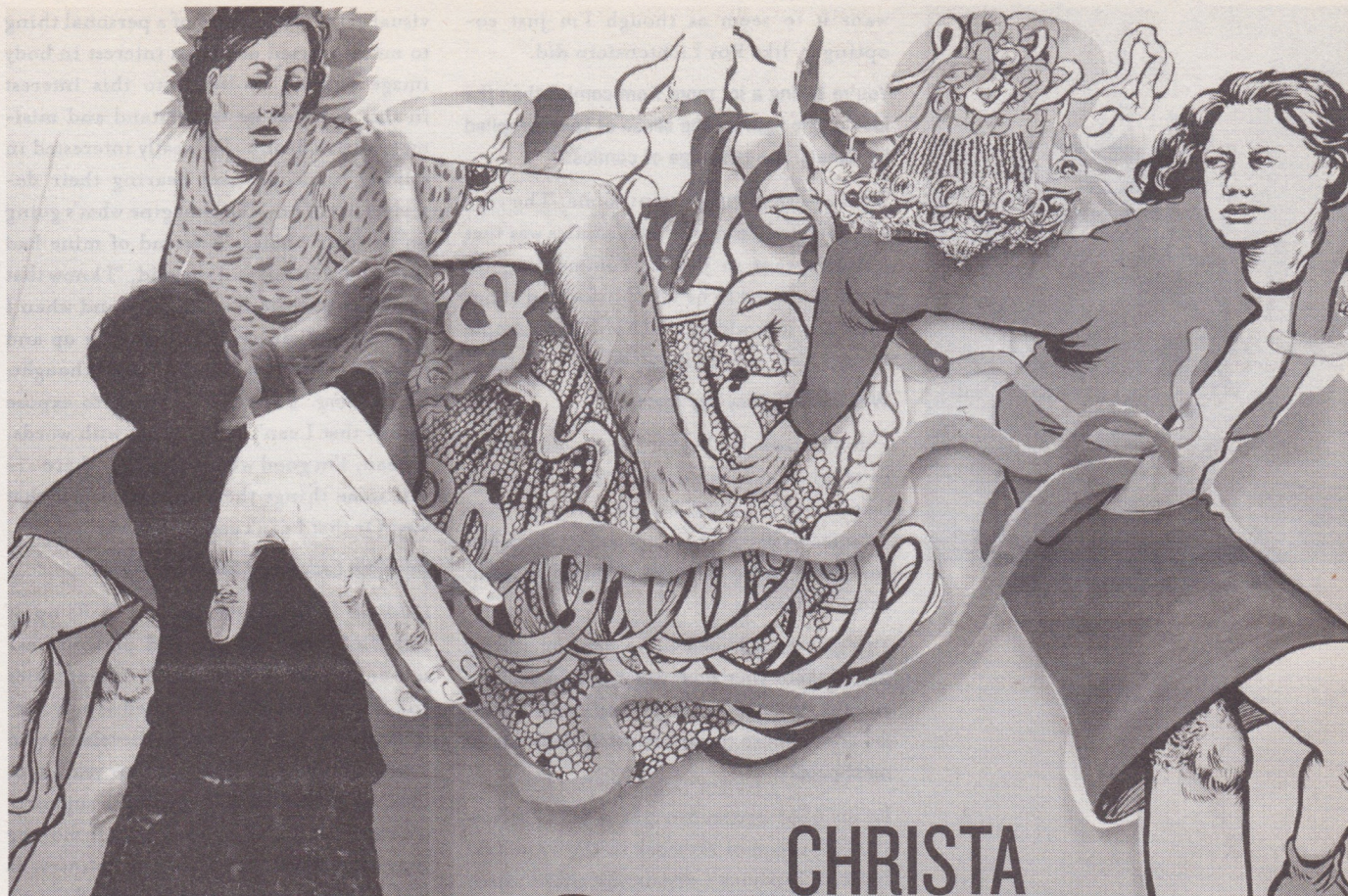
I dunno. I mean, it's funny because I'm obsessed with comics, right, and I became obsessed with comics after I started drawing like that, because people were saying, "You should look at so-and-so's work," and so I started reading more and got really inspired by what was out there. So I'm sort of comics inspired *now*, but that's not really where it came from, necessarily. Also now I *do* comics. It was really important to me once I started doing this work that I not just be comics inspired, but that I contribute something to the form as well. So I'm a comics artist . . .

And a *real* artist?

[*Laughs.*] Yeah. A gallery artist that uses that kind of iconography in my work.

What do you think of that difference? Many would say it's the difference between Roy Lichtenstein and Chris Ware, for example.

I'm adamant about placing myself not as someone who's commenting on comics as popular culture, but commenting on them as an artform that I'm involved in, an artform as its own medium. I don't



CHRISTA

DONNER



want it to seem as though I'm just co-opting it, like Roy Lichtenstein did.

You're taking a lot more from comics than the look of the figures: the sense of space implied by panels, the language of comics.

That was really important to me. The reason I started doing my own comics was that I didn't want to just be commenting on them. I wanted to be more informed about them. So it would be a lot harder for people to say I was "comics inspired."

What should they say instead?

I don't know. If I could come up with a catch phrase, I would put it in all my press materials. It would be great if they said "comics artist and . . . something else." But that's not going to make it sound great to those audiences.

This gets back to one of the most interesting things about your work which is that you're a zinester, you're a fine artist, and you're a comics artist. Those things are totally separate to most people.

In my grad program right now, if I show the full range of my work in the same critique, it becomes a discussion about which one I should focus on. Which is not even an option for me, because they completely inform each other. They're all aspects of the same thing, but represent different ways of approaching the same thing.

What "same thing" are they all aspects of?

I address the media with them and I address the body with them. Zines are more on the media end of things. *Ladyfriend* is my approach to not being satisfied with mainstream magazines, so I'm making my own. Also there's the feminism thing—zines are my way of directly interfacing with this amazing community of women and meeting new friends. Then the visual art—and I include comics in that category—is critiquing the media on a different level, presenting alternate images of women and their complexities in a more abstract way.

What do you accomplish with fine art that you don't accomplish with zines, and vice versa?

In the zines I'm utilizing my writing skills. I'm providing media and trying to find a really diverse range of actual women to contribute and putting them together. The

visual art is much more of a personal thing to me. It started out as an interest in body image and it's evolved into this interest in this way that we understand and misimagine our health. I'm really interested in talking to people and hearing their descriptions of how they imagine what's going on in their bodies. A friend of mine had this ear infection and she said, "I know that there's this white tree in there and when I put the medicine in it's shriveling up and parts of it are coming out," and I thought, *that's amazing*. ¶ I use the visuals to expose things that I can't really get at with words. I mean, I'm good with words, but there are just some things that you can't access that way. Or that I can't access that way.

Describe *Ladyfriend* for me.

Ladyfriend is a compilation zine made up of interviews and articles and personal essays and how-tos written by different ladies and friends of ladies. It started as a project to celebrate my friends in Cleveland who were moving away. That was four years ago. I had an incredible community, a supportive community, and they were all moving away to different parts of the country. It started out as a very personal friend thing, and then it got reviewed in a couple major magazines—*Bust* gave it a really good review—and then I started getting submissions from all over.

This was your first zine?

I did a zine in college for awhile called *Sissy*. This was when *Sassy* became lame and eventually folded, so I made a zine as a response to that. It was all written by me. Then I took four or five years off. I was completely out of the zine loop at that point. I wasn't even sure that there were zines still being made—which is hilarious now, to me. I also do *Free Advice*, which is sort of a side project. It doesn't make any money. In fact it's free.

One of the weirdest things about zinesters—and this applies to you, but it also applies to me—is that they can be doing a hundred million different amazing things. They can be very successful—working in areas that are socially responsible, lucrative, incredibly rewarding, or creative—but every zinester I know pretty much only wants to talk about their zine. It seems you do so with *Ladyfriend*. Sometimes, more so than with your artwork.

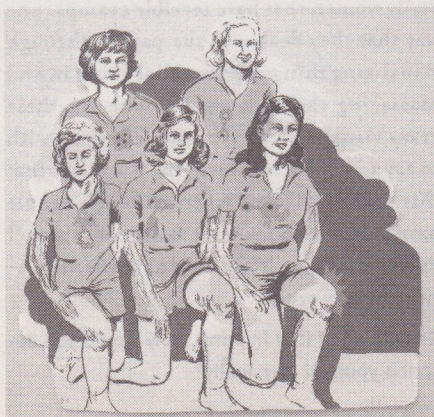
It depends on who I'm talking to. I mean, the artwork is much more lucrative, actually. The funny thing is that when I went on this zine tour this summer, a lot of people came to the show because they know my artwork, which I wasn't expecting. It's easier for me to talk about the zines because I don't do the whole thing. I put it together and it's my zine, but there are all these other amazing people involved too, so I don't sound so stuck up when I'm excited about my zine, because I'm also boasting about the work of these other people. ¶ I was just on a panel about making a career for yourself as an artist and all these people came up to me after and were like, "Oh, I love your work," and I was like, "Thanks, thanks." And one person came up to me and said, "I've seen your zine at Quimby's and it's just the most charming thing." And I totally lit up! I was like, *woo-hoo! That's so great!* It totally made my day.

I would also think *Ladyfriend* might be easier to talk about because you edit it, so you develop a language to talk about it.

In the visual art I have an artist's statement and all that, and I have a very clear idea of the overarching theme that connects all of it, but it's very strange. Because I'm a woman, it's weird for me to talk about my work. I introduce myself to people as an artist—I mean, that's what I do—but that includes making zines, making comics, and making the stuff that I show in galleries.

About six months ago, you did an interview with me in *Ladyfriend's* Cute issue. That conversation helped me sort out a lot of things that I feel we have in common, one of which is that we both surround ourselves with men; we both work in very masculine environments, and are totally unwilling to be any less feminine in them. One of the ways that that works is through embracing cuteness, which in our circles is pretty rare.

That particular issue of *Ladyfriend* I ended up writing a lot of the pieces myself, which I hadn't done since the first issue. I think a lot of people felt intimidated by the theme. It's a really complicated issue. For a lot of people cute implies superficiality—and there is that level to it—but it's a lot more complicated than that. You can be totally cute and have physical deformities or be 50



I introduce myself to people as an artist—I mean, that's what I do—but that includes making zines, making comics, and making the stuff that I show in galleries.



I got really fascinated by people's stories about their bodies and the way that they were imagining them and how that could be used in a more productive way. Like how you could imagine and create for yourself this whole alternate system that you could understand in a non-medical context.

years old or all these other things that supposedly can't fit into that.

However, since that issue, more of the work that I've seen of yours has veered away from being "cute" a little bit. It's become more messy.

Well, it's always been messy. I'm messy.

I'm referring more to the paper ripping, the protrusions from the wall. There's something about your current work that's a little more violent. It's developing more of an edge.

I was very much about this body image/mass media idea—that was where my work was coming from initially, and my background in modeling had something to do with that. But as I get further away from that—those ideas have been dealt with successfully by many people—I just started to really move in on what aspect of the body I'm interested in. I got really fascinated by people's stories about their bodies and the way that they were imagining them and how that could be used in a more productive way. Like how you could imagine and create for yourself this whole alternate system that you could understand in a non-medical context. I have had my own health things come up, like there's this question about if I have endometriosis, a disease that doctors don't really understand. If you look it up in any health book, it says, "No one knows the cause, no one knows how to cure it." Basically the only thing you can do is go on the pill, which seems to be the cure for every female health issue. I feel like with most illnesses, especially those having to do with women's reproductive organs, medical science doesn't necessarily cover it. So why not come up with your own explanations? ¶ I've found that visualizing that stuff really helps. The more that I talk to people, especially women that have terrible cramps, one way that they deal with the pain is through visualizing things like noodles going in and massaging the pain away. There are these crazy visualizations that they come up with to try to cope with the pain. ¶ I think that this stuff is a little darker, although people have always seen my work as sort of creepy. I don't mind that at all; I think my sensibilities are very creepy.

So with all of that in mind, how would you describe yourself physically?

The exterior of my body?

I'm just askin'.

I'm a small person, I am cute—or so I'm told—and until recently I've thought of myself as frail and fragile. I've made some changes in my work and in my life and I think I'm actually really strong now. These huge wall drawings that I do, that makes me feel kind of tough. It surprises people to see a tiny little person make this thing that fills up an entire room. I'm very petite and I try to seem tough.

Well, I didn't mean to trick you, but I wanted to underline that, while you're talking about some really crazy things, you're actually not unapproachable.

Oh, I'm very friendly. I'm very approachable. I mean, I used to be a model.

When was this?

Right after high school. I was a *Sassy* cover model. I think that informed a lot of my ideas about the media. It led me to do the zine, it led me to the work that I'm doing. It definitely helped me get my priorities straight as far as what I wanted to do after high school. ¶ You know, I wasn't at all popular, and it was like, *that would really show them if I was a model and I got into this magazine and then they'd think I was cool.* I'd never had a boyfriend. And then once I did it I realized that I wanted to become well known for something that I had accomplished, something that had to do with who I was as a person. And really, I was told that I was frail and unhealthy all the time. And I didn't want to put myself out there as a model.

You were telling me yesterday that when you were growing up, you felt you had a career choice to make between being a magician, a comedian, an artist, or an astronaut.

There was once an astronaut with my first name, but she died. It really upset me. And the magician and the comedian both involved public speaking, which I wasn't that comfortable with. I was a painfully shy child until I was in the eighth grade and I made a conscious decision to try to break out of that. I didn't really become comfortable with public speaking until I was working at this gallery after college. Maybe now I'll give up this artist thing and go back into magical comedy. ☺

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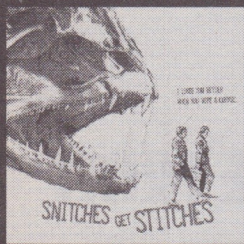
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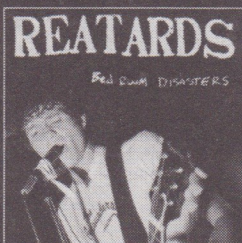
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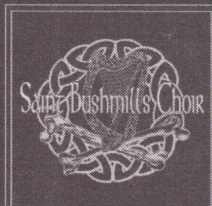
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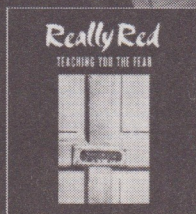
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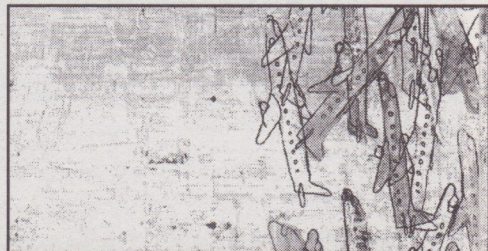


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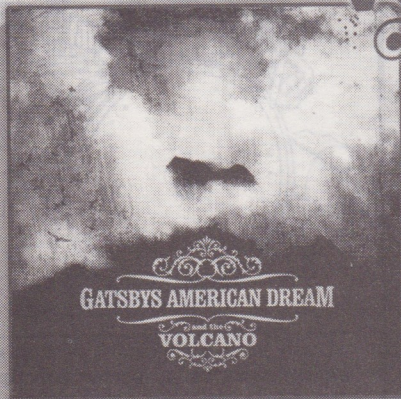
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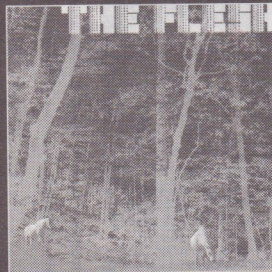
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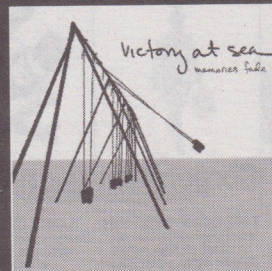
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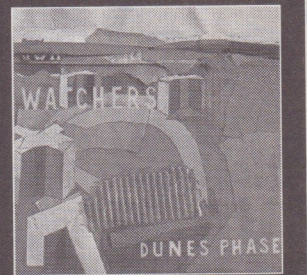
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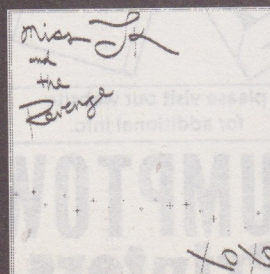


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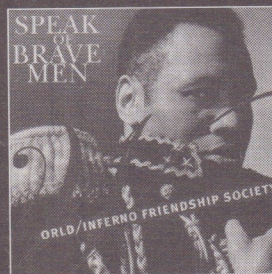


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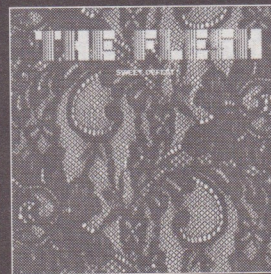
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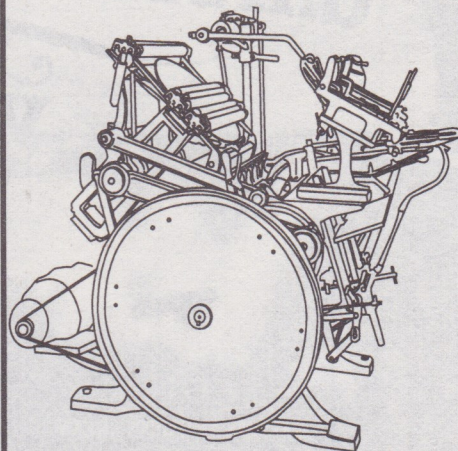
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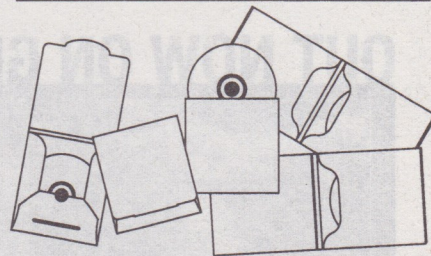


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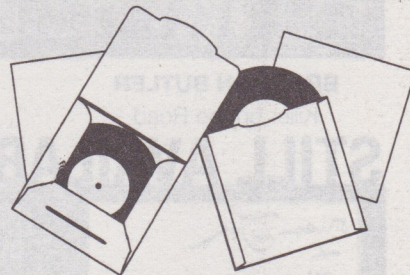
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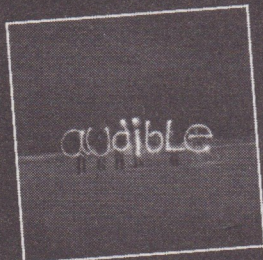
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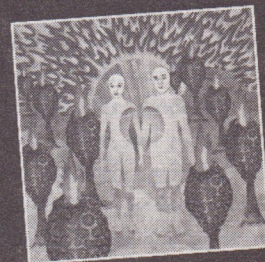
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BY MOLLIE WELLS

AS DIY CRAFTS SHIFT FROM TREND TO MOVEMENT,

REDESIGNING FASHION

UPSTART FASHION DESIGNERS STRUGGLE TO STITCH TOGETHER A BUSINESS PLAN.

There's no getting around it: DIY fashion is *in*, at least for now. Everyone's got that thrown-together-and-sewn-myself thing happening, even Kelly Clarkson. Which means that it may very quickly be on its way out.

But the desire for DIY fashion runs much deeper than a carefully-placed stitch on a carefully-placed celebrity. This semi-underground arm of the fashion industry isn't simply a trend or a passing phase, it's a community and a common business practice for tons of independent designers.

To some, the now-trendy DIY fashion industry is reminiscent of the dot-com boom and bust. In 2000 or so, when the dot-coms crashed and the Internet start-up craze was pronounced dead, countless case studies analyzing every possible angle of the giants' rise and fall were produced. Each study seemed to come to the same basic conclusion: The overwhelming lack of business plans.

The DIY fashion industry hasn't learned from the dot-coms mistakes—very few business plans are to be found among the scraps of fabric and knitting needles that fill designers' studios. Yet there's an important distinction to be made between those companies and the designers profiled below: The dot-coms' primary function was to make money and when that stopped happening, the services they ostensibly provided became moot.

But the clothing these designers create will never be moot. Business plan or not, these companies survive for reasons beyond high profits. Like new indie bands, these indie designers are just

now navigating their way through a new and complicated business. Normal rules just don't apply.

Notice, for instance, how competition is barely a factor:

"I don't feel like I have true competition," says Amet and Sasha's Jesse Kelly-Landes. "Because there really are a lot of indie designers out there, but we're making a lot of different things, and people need more than one outfit. I think all of the other indie designers help maintain a certain standard of quality coming from the group, and that's really helpful. I honestly look at other designers' work to see how they get such super-rich quality."

Perhaps most important to their long-term survival, DIY fashion designers, unlike upscale clothiers, don't exist in a vacuum. As long as the culture shifts and changes, so too will the clothes—and the designers—which makes for good long-term health in the DIY fashion world.

Sasha Clothing Co. of Seattle, Washington

Amy Carlsen lives in a land of fabric: floors carpeted in yellow mesh and dark denim, hot pink florals creeping up the walls. Her coffee table, once a dark-chocolate wood, is layered with faint logos of bands for whom she's created merch, an inevitable by-product of screen-printing onto porous materials. Sewing machines, scraps of colored paper, zippers, thread, and accent decals all hog every available inch; forget a path for walking. The space, to be honest, is chaotic. But to Carlsen, founder and co-owner of Sasha Clothing Co., it's simply an extension of her designs.



THE CRAFT IS WHAT BROUGHT THEM HERE, AND THE CRAFT IS WHAT MAKES THEM STAY.



"I am mostly influenced by the madness in my brain," she says.

From neon candy-striped tops to thick, multi-layered wristbands used as band merchandise, everything Carlsen and partner Laura Danforth create at Sasha Clothing Co. reflects a mild schizophrenia: something slightly off, something beautiful but a little insane. Mesh and neon, stripes and florals, bright orange threads with off-kilter stitches—it all exudes the unmistakable aura of a very, very happy accident.

That Sasha Clothing Co. exists at all is, in itself, a very happy accident. Becoming a fashion designer, let alone owning a company, was never on Carlsen's teenage to-do list.

"Growing up in the Midwest, I always wanted to be different than everyone else," Carlsen explains. "I was always very into cutting my own hair, cutting off sleeves, that sort of thing. But I never knew how to sew. No one in my immediate family did, so I never learned."

Carlsen discovered a love for sewing only after receiving a sewing machine as a gift. She started with some clothes for herself, then handbags for a friend's vegan shoe store. Seattle hardcore band the Blood Brothers caught wind of the goods and asked for a few customized wristbands for their merch table, an item that fans devoured—and that set the word-of-mouth ablaze. E-mails poured in from fans thirsty for clothing that mimicked the wristbands. Bands (including Pretty Girls Make Graves and Dillinger Escape Plan) with their sights set on colorfully updated merch approached Carlsen with ideas and requests. Seemingly overnight, she had a full-blown business on her hands. After years of

promoting shows, designing for corporate firms and working as a full-time nanny, finding what appeared to be her calling was a welcome event.

So it isn't a surprise that Sasha Clothing Co.'s business policy is as equally no-frills as its inception. Sure, Carlsen and Danforth understand that a solid business tends to need a solid business plan, but they'd rather not get mired down in jargon and number-crunching. The craft is what brought them here, and the craft is what makes them stay. If it comes down to setting up a goal meeting or pouring their thoughts into a new set of frenzied handbags, they'll always choose the bags.

Goal meetings, after all, are really the province of those who expect massive amounts of growth, those who wish to break into a larger, and much broader, market. Naive as it may sound, Carlsen and Danforth just aren't all that interested. They'd like to see a day when they could, for financial purposes, hire out some of their sewing work, but they certainly haven't quit their day jobs in anticipation of it. And they certainly don't let those financial purposes get in the way of their love for the designs.

"Designing with the attitude of wanting mass consumer consumption would be rather inhibiting," Carlsen says. "We take pride in the fact that most of our items will never be two of a kind. Even with the Blood Brothers merchandise, no two wristbands will ever be the same.

"Aww," she smiles. "It's like a snowflake."

Two Busy Bees of Yucipa, California

Aida Smith has a history with history. It started in her grandparents' basement, a slipcover business run by the two Cuban immigrants in Washington, DC, one that boasted such clientele as Henry Kissinger. It continued in her mother's fingers weaving wool and bobbin lace. It passed through her father's knack for teaching and the way he showed Smith how to fully appreciate vintage and antique items ("Before vintage was vogue," she says). It coasted into Smith's college career as a history major. And it ended (or, at least, is currently resting) with her creation of Two Busy Bees.

Two Busy Bees' handbags are a modern take on mom's apron strings: vintage fabric and adornments reconstructed, updated and streamlined. Each bag is teeming with nostalgia and purity, a breath of eras long past. Just look at the item names: Evelyn, Beatrice, Dorothy—true 1949 kicked swiftly into the post-millennium, gilded prints and all. These bags are refined and polished.

Yet Smith, knowing only that she desperately wanted to be a business owner, wasn't always sure what Two Busy Bees would do. In fact, she's had the name far longer than the actual idea.

"I actually purchased the domain name www.twobusybees.com with a friend of mine about eight years ago," Smith says. "Both of us knew that we wanted to start our own businesses. We also knew that securing the domain name was crucial if either one of us ever wanted to use that name. It wasn't until 2003 that one of us, who happened to be me, started a business and took the name."

The start of said business is humbler than some. Two Busy Bees began in local consignment shops, a bag or two at a time, until Smith opted for an online storefront after three months. Going the Internet route was smart, considering her rural locale. It's brought her work to a much larger audience and provided opportunities she wouldn't otherwise have had, such as the chance to enter her bags in a silent charity auction benefiting HeartShare, a children's charity in New York City. Having that web presence, she explains, makes running her business that much easier.

Not that the business of Two Busy Bees is all that simple. It's very much something of Smith's own, consistent with her family's experience in the trade and reminiscent of the bags themselves. It harkens back to days spent planning around a kitchen table, cozy and warm—days long before Quicken and Excel. Instead of a formal business plan, Smith opts for a handwritten list detailing "specific objectives," placed carefully on her worktable and reviewed frequently.

"To be honest, I've never thought of my list as my official business or marketing strategy, but that is clearly what it is," she says. "I just think of it as my 'to-do' list."

Don't mistake the cozy nature of Smith's business policies for a lack of knowledge; her business sense is sharp and savvy, even if not entirely conventional. Smith is well aware of her place in the market, her competition and the needs of her clientele, whom she calls "fashion-conscious individualists." Checkbook covers, for instance, will never be among the items offered by Two Busy Bees, but PDA covers are a definite possibility. And mass-market competition (Old Navy has recently begun selling similar vintage-inspired bags) isn't necessarily a primary concern, as Two Busy Bees' customers will always prefer a one-of-a-kind bag over one found at the mall. Besides, Smith says, it's the personality that makes the piece, not the manufacturer.



IT'S THE PERSONALITY
THAT MAKES THE PIECE,
NOT THE MANUFACTURER.

I NEVER WANT IT TO GET TO A POINT WHERE I'M NOT INVOLVED IN MAKING THINGS MYSELF.



Smallthings of Portland, Oregon

It was the dreaming that did her in. Prior to that, Theresa Robinson had her path paved: A studio art major at Hampshire College; a junior year trip to Mexico to do some painting and study Spanish; back to school, graduation and a life as a painter. Cut-and-dried.

The dreams started during the Mexico trip: Robinson took a jewelry class just to see what it was like. She started dreaming about the process, and it was all over from there.

"I remember telling my teacher that I had dreamt about soldering bezels the night before," Robinson says. "He was like, 'Oh, you're screwed!'"

And so Smallthings began.

It's difficult to explain the allure of Robinson's jewelry; in text, it seems bland. Intricate, delicate, detailed pieces that take the most ordinary of items—birds and flowers, as well as abstract, ornamental images—and memorialize them in sterling silver and candy-colored glass. Though the craftsmanship is striking and certainly carries the initial draw, it's the way Robinson appropriates these images that preaches volumes for her work.

"When I was in school, I was working with a lot of anatomical images, like medical illustrations, and putting them in a whole new context," she says. "So when I first started, the imagery I was into was just little things, the birds and bugs and flowers, which are really things that are around us every day. I was all about enshrining those images and making them into something new and special and important by giving them their own little place in the world of metal and glass."

Art and concept aside, the actual business of Smallthings started with Robinson, a cigar box, and a list of Portland consignment shops. When her pieces started to sell, she took an almost unthinkable leap: quit her job and committed herself to making jewelry full-time. In retrospect, she says, it was probably pretty silly, since she was nowhere close to making a decent income from

the work and didn't know exactly how she was going to work that out. But she says it felt extremely necessary—Robinson knew that this was what she wanted to do and refused to let anything, least of all money, stand in her way.

"When I went into this," she says, "I had absolutely no idea what I was getting myself into at all. I was thinking more along the lines of 'I want to make jewelry' not 'I want to start a business.'"

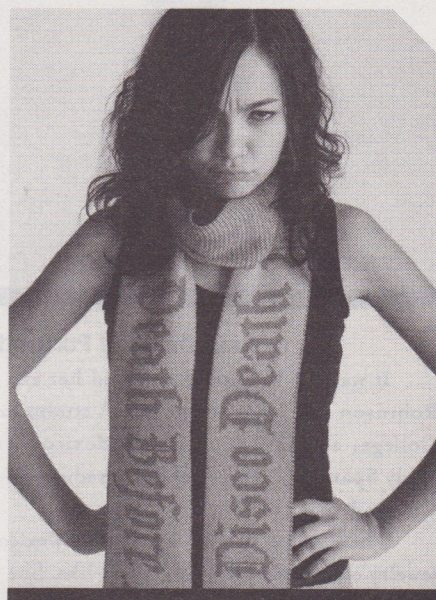
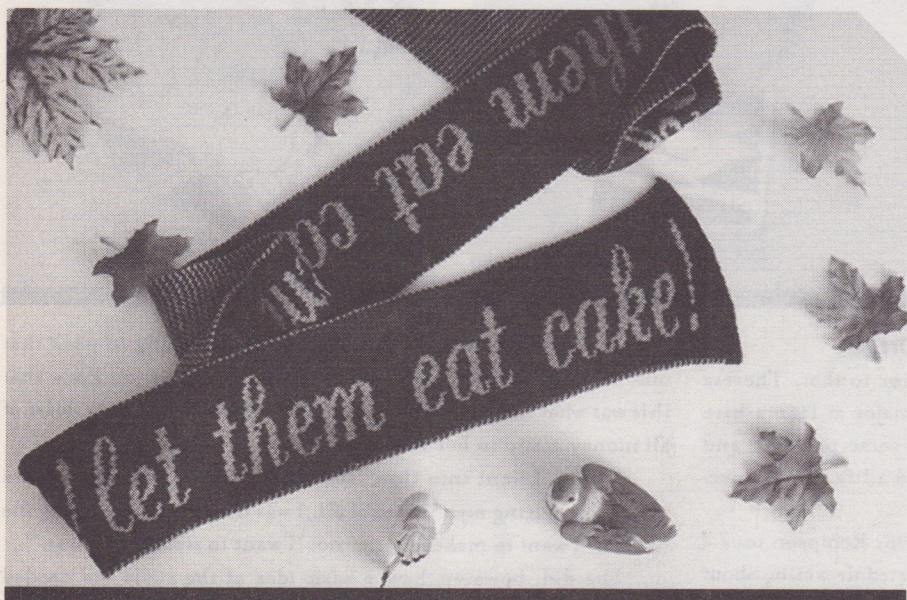
She did, however, have a basic idea of the goals she needed to accomplish to stay functional—back then, it was about 25 pieces per week (now it averages closer to 125)—and what she didn't understand about running a business, she'd pick up as she went along. Robinson navigated her way through dealing with retailers, maintaining a website, finding a target demographic, and gathering press attention. She learned that a few carefully placed ads can work wonders for word-of-mouth and that a marketing plan, however rudimentary, takes a little bit of money. She learned that a formal business plan isn't always necessary, and that creating a business from the ground up, even if it takes a little while, might be the most satisfying thing in existence.

"If you're going to start a business, it's not going to happen overnight," Robinson warns potential entrepreneurs. "But once it does, it's amazing and so satisfying and exciting because it's all yours."

Now Smallthings is so heavily in business that Robinson has had to hire someone to come in and help three days a week. Actually, she admits, she really needs to hire more, but because of the fickle winds associated with this business, she's afraid of hiring someone only to put them right back out of a job. Robinson says she'd like to keep things small anyway, at least as small as she can, especially considering she started the business because she enjoys the process of creating things.

"I never want things to get so big that I turn into, like, the big boss lady just directing things from my desk," she says. "I never want it to get to a point where I'm not involved in making things myself."

I REALLY ENJOY THAT MY SCARVES AREN'T
MANUFACTURED OVERSEAS WITH WHO-
KNOWS-WHO ACTUALLY LABORING TO CREATE IT



Lulette of Cincinnati, Ohio

Diane Naegel is so close to her knitting machine that she's named it: Thor. Machinery or not, Thor is the best kind of friend. He's there day and night, always dependable and reliable. He helps her get through the most challenging projects. He does what Naegel tells him: *Stitch this here, Thor. No, put that letter there.* Thor, for all purposes, is Naegel's partner—and Lulette's backbone.

Lulette, a knitwear company specializing in scarves scrawled with various phrases in blazing fonts, is the place to go for customization. Though Naegel provides several pre-designed messages—"Cupcake Queen," "Death Before Disco," and "Heavenly"—are just a few of the options—anybody can dictate what their scarf will say and in what colors it'll say it. A self-proclaimed "specialty item," Lulette caters to the individualist in all of us; Naegel offers to customize the items in whatever way she can. She does, after all, want the customer to have the best experience possible. That's just part of the business.

For Naegel, that business was always her ultimate goal. Introduced to the industry by her mother, a costume jewelry buyer for a major retailer, Naegel's love affair with knitwear started in college. As a fashion design major, she was entranced by the idea of creating her own materials and knew instinctively—the way babies know to cry for food—that a knitwear-based company was in her future. After graduating and exploring the world of corporate design, Naegel found that nothing held her heart quite like the

idea of owning a business. Lulette was born as much a product of necessity as desire.

Terrifying though it may have been, Naegel leaped in, creating a basic business plan (target market and price points, specifically) and figuring out the rest while she worked.

"For me, it really took learning the process along the way," Naegel says. "Things like keeping stocked on supplies, learning the hassles of importing materials from England, and how to communicate with clients."

This last is important: Naegel strives to achieve an air of the personal among her business transactions. That's precisely why she rejects the idea of having her items mass-produced, even as volume is steadily increasing.

"I really enjoy that my scarves aren't manufactured overseas with who-knows-who actually laboring to create it," she explains. "I think my clients are drawn to that as much as anything else."

Still, she admits, there may come a time when she needs to hire a few extra hands to help with all the orders—Thor is starting to feel overworked. But she remains adamant about knowing who is doing the work.

"There are knitters around the country who work out of their homes on a contract basis," Naegel explains. "I want to avoid outsourcing to anyone who is so large that they can't tell me who's working on my pieces. I'd rather pay more than not be sure."

Amet and Sasha of Austin, Texas

Jesse Kelly-Landes used to be obsessed with skin-colored body suits. It was the '80s and she was in junior high. Honestly, the obsession isn't quite that ridiculous, but it was enough to make her drama teacher deny her requests, year after year, to make costumes for the holiday play.

That is Kelly-Landes' first memory of fashion design.

Unfortunately, Kelly-Landes didn't start Amet and Sasha out of a desire to revive the skin-colored body suit. No, Amet and Sasha is an amalgamation of her need for handmade clothes that not only fit well, but also exuded simplicity and classical elegance. Amet and Sasha is crafty and high-concept, lush with texture and Great Gatsby throwbacks (a testament to Kelly-Landes' interest in history, the subject in which she holds a BA). It's casual clothing, but casual powered up by 10.

The company, according to Kelly-Landes, was started "completely unwittingly," an accidental out-of-college project. While working a job in epidemiology and preparing for grad school, she found herself making tons of clothes. Her friends, in a wonderful peer-pressure way, convinced her that she should try to sell some of the designs. Since she'd wanted to learn web design anyway, Kelly-Landes decided to give it a go.

"I built Amet and Sasha's first website when I should have been filling out grad school applications," she says. "By the time it was time for me to pack up and move to Atlanta for school, my business was going so well that I didn't want to just quit it. So I deferred—and never went back."

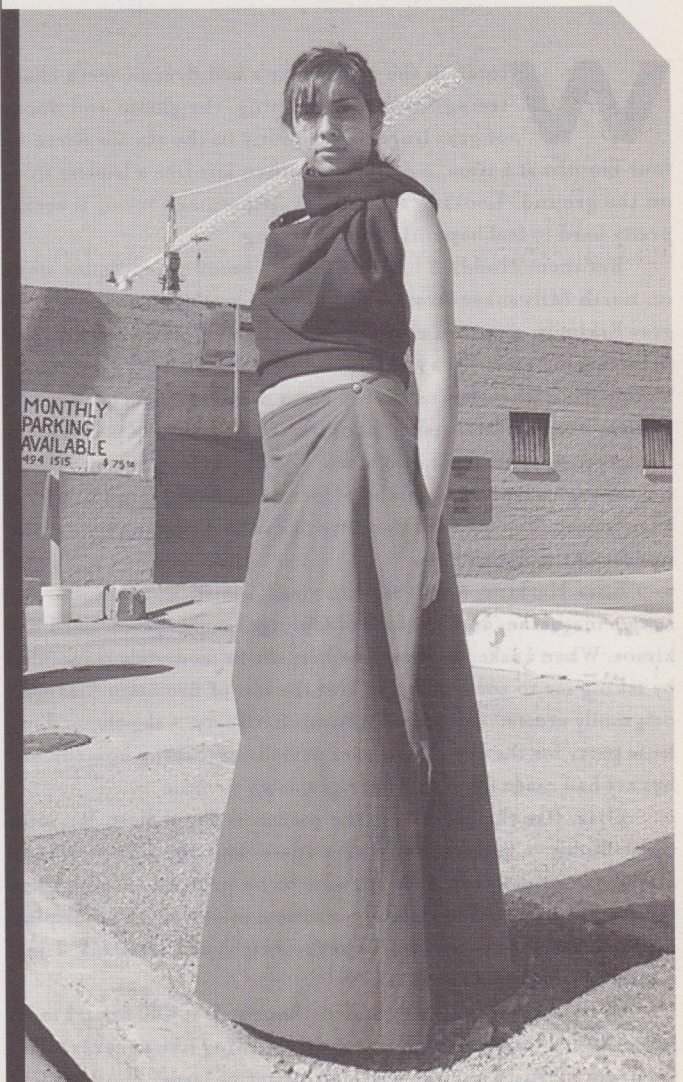
The nearly instant success of her business didn't leave Kelly-Landes with much time for planning. She never worked out a solid business plan or marketing strategies, opting instead to operate on word-of-mouth and consistently good customer service (which includes frequent customizations and alterations). In fact, it's only been within the last year or so that Kelly-Landes has even seen a need to have employ traditional business tactics. She's aware of her demographic and has begun to target ads to publications that cater specifically to them. She knows which cities love her clothes and which are sort of lukewarm, and she's got a definite grasp on the business of dealing with retailers and press alike.

Still, Kelly-Landes likes to use her original mode of operation as frequently as possible: word of mouth as spread by a tightly connected community. Her involvement in the Austin Craft Mafia is a testament to that, as is her production of a yearly fashion show with friends Tina Lockwood of Sparklecrafter and Karly Hand of Identity Crisis Clothing. She also prides herself on keeping true to her handmade roots.

"I will always handcraft everything," she explains. "I think clothing design is something a lot of people can do, but handcrafting makes the clothes truly unique and special. If I can't make them myself or with the assistance of a few employees, then I won't make it."

For many in the burgeoning DIY craft movement, Kelly-Landes' words ring true. And while not every one of their businesses will make it, for the proprietors of these upstart companies, simply trying is success enough. ©

IF I CAN'T MAKE THEM MYSELF
OR WITH THE ASSISTANCE
OF A FEW EMPLOYEES, THEN
I WON'T MAKE IT.



Artist Elisa Harkins wants her art to catch you by surprise—walking down the streets of Chicago and being confronted by her sadly sweet public art, how couldn't it?

ESKIMO KISSES

By Joe Meno Photography by Todd Baxter

Winter in the Midwest is a bad dream: teeth chattering, strangers sneezing, the gloom and doom of gray lingering cloudily in the sky for three or four months at a time, a discarded mitten left like a lifeless limb on the ground. Looking around any Midwestern town, it seems pretty hard to feel hopeful about anything.

But then: Huddled brightly above a boarded-up liquor store on north Milwaukee Avenue in Chicago, you spot two pink and gray Eskimos, a pair of cartoonish, wide-eyed girls, who happen to be sharing a meal of a raw fish and seal, their mouths and hands bloody from what they're eating. For a moment, it seems like the endless stream of miserable, honking traffic pauses, a passerby on the street stops to smile and stare, and you are no longer trudging through a frozen wasteland of looming unhappiness. You have been moved. You are now standing in a secret, glowing spot in the middle of the North Pole.

Elisa Harkins, a 25-year-old visual artist, web designer for *Lumpen* magazine, and resident of Chicago, makes giant-sized Eskimos. When I asked to interview her, she immediately responded by asking me to come along to post the last of five foam Eskimos, originally created for *Lumpen*'s Apres Ski Party, a ski-themed release party for the art and politics periodical. Seeing how curious her art had made me, I said yes right away.

Elisa, like the characters she paints, is shy at first. We meet up at Buddy, a gallery that shares space with the *Lumpen* offices, and she confides that she's nervous to be profiled. When asked the simple question of why she puts these pieces of art on display, she just smiles and replies, "They're bright and colorful. I just thought it would be nice."

Her answer makes me wonder, though. Is it OK for art to be nice? At this moment, with the world spinning like a gear is missing from its rusty engine, with the clatter of larger conflicts like

greed, war, poverty, and apathy roaring everywhere, shouldn't artists be responsible for challenging, postulating, intervening, and forcing change?

Maybe. Or maybe not. Maybe the artist has more than just one responsibility. Maybe the complexities of the world demand more than one kind of art. Seeing the two cartoon Eskimo girls sharing their meal above the burnt-out storefront, it becomes clear that there are a million worlds that need saving, the smallest of which contains the remnants of our imaginations, and the best art, political or not, asks us to begin there, in the realm of untold, unrealized possibility.

Elisa's visual art depicts these often-forgotten worlds and grows directly from her work as a storyteller. Creating a project for the "Little Utopias" show as part of the Select Media Festival, Elisa built a small white geodesic dome, complete with three small storybooks: an open invitation for viewers to crawl inside, sit, and read. The three stories, "Girl on a Boat," "Robot and Monkey," and "Eskimo With a Girl in His Belly," are magical folktales—simply-drawn narratives which depict somewhat tragic situations. The girl on the boat cries out of loneliness. The robot and monkey, whose friendship is so lively and happy, are forbidden to remain friends at the end of the story. The third tale, which begins, "There once was a giant Eskimo with a little girl in his belly," follows the lonely giant, unaware of the small companion he carries around with him, who sets off on series of adventures in search of a friend—riding around on a cloud, meeting a fairy, falling into the sea. Finally, he discovers the small girl hiding in his belly, and with this realization, the giant is made happy.

Human connection seems to be at the heart of Elisa's work: using storybook imagery contrasted with sometimes surprising, tragic details, she balances the childlike sense of wonder with the





recurring disappointments of adulthood. Folktales often work to reveal and conquer fear, and the fear Elisa's work touches upon is the danger of disconnection from other people; the girl alone in the middle of the sea, the friendship between two unlike creatures, the giant who travels far and wide to find someone, anyone. Her art functions the way all good stories do. It establishes a simple connection between the artist and audience, between the audience and other members of the audience, forging real but invisible relationships. In the end, her art is less about overt messages than simply challenging our myopic sense of loneliness.

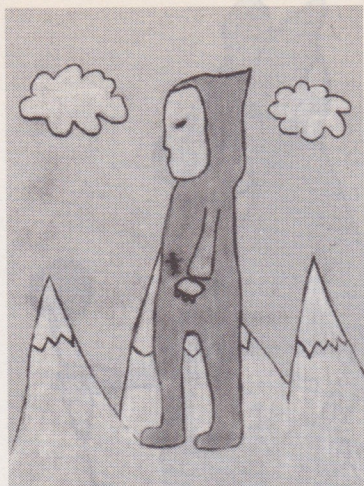
It was those same wonderfully tragic stories that caught the attention of Logan Bay, a clerk at Quimby's bookstore. Seeing her books at the "Little Utopias" show, he asked Elisa to help create a window display for the zine and comic shop using the same Eskimo imagery from her handmade book. With Logan's help, Elisa made the transition from flat page drawings to two-dimensional sculpture, painting and building an entire winter landscape from foam, a North Pole diorama complete with a poor Eskimo, tearfully offering her disgorged heart to a dangerous-looking polar bear. Again, at first glance, the playful colors and round lines suggest the simplicity of a nursery rhyme. But, like

"Ring Around the Rosy," something much more poignant, much more interesting lurks beneath.

Back at Buddy gallery, we get ready to put up the last of Elisa's Eskimos, "Girl Number Five," who has been painted with large, glassy tears spilling from her eyes. Perhaps she is crying out of the shame of being the last one chosen, perhaps from the thought of going outside. No matter. Elisa grabs the huge foam girl, then a tool bag full of screws and nails and a small hammer, while I get the ladder.

Before we head out, Elisa stops, pulls out a magic marker, and signs her piece. She prints "Pooper" in small letters, then replaces the cap on the marker and gingerly lifts the Eskimo from her feet. When I ask her why she signs her piece like this, she says, "It's a funny name I call people. My friend Ringo started calling me it, so it's my nickname now."

Pooptronica, Elisa's website, contains links to many of her various, interesting ongoing projects: her Eskimos, of course; her blog, the-poop.yayhooray.com, where she writes about recent dreams; her zine, *Digital Disobedients*, which documents the work of a wide array of digital and nets artists, like Kenneth Hung, OIOOIOIIIOIOIIIOI.org, and the Yes Men; also available at her site



"Last time, I was signing one of the girls and a cop saw me and just walked by."

"Why do you think he didn't say anything?" I ask.

"I don't know," she says. **"Maybe he liked it."**

are digital versions of her storybooks and photos of her Eskimos displayed at various spots in the city.

As we head outside, I ask Elisa if she's ever had trouble with the cops, putting up giant Eskimos in public places. She says, "Last time, I was signing one of the girls and a cop saw me and just walked by."

"Why do you think he didn't say anything?" I ask.

"I don't know," she says. "Maybe he liked it."

Elisa's first experiment with public art began after the tragedy of September 11. Saddened by the event and troubled by the jingoistic fervor that seemed to overshadow the actual catastrophe, Elisa made posters of a small girl standing in the debris of the fallen towers and posted them throughout her neighborhood. Unlike the number of paper flags many newspapers made available, as well as a variety of banners and posters which proclaimed sentiments like, "These colors don't run," Elisa's image spoke of the actual tragedy of the event, the human beings lost beneath the political posturing.

Tonight, we brace for the cold and make our way down Milwaukee Avenue with the Eskimo and ladder in tow. At 9:00 p.m., the street is strangely empty: A few couples and a few lonely-hearts wander about and pay no attention to us as we march down to the remains of El Hito, a liquor store that's been boarded up. It's the first place I saw Elisa's Eskimos, one of them eating a fish, the other eating a small seal.

"One of them was gone within a few days and the other within a week," she says. When one of the owners of Earwax Café, located across the street from the boarded up liquor store, told her that she had spotted one of the Eskimos in someone's house while on a

food delivery, Elisa wasn't sure if she should be sad or happy.

We stand the ladder against the boarded-up façade and carefully, fighting against the wind, Elisa lays the tearful Eskimo against the plywood, over a layer of flyers for local bands, and asks me to hand her some nails. She starts hammering away and soon, one by one, people walking by slow down and grin.

When she's nailed in the bottom half, Elisa asks me to nail in the top. I'm a little taller than she is and, having placed it as high as she can, I'm happy to give it a try.

After the Eskimo is safely posted, we stand and stare for a few moments and then decide to go see if her fourth Eskimo girl is still standing. We hurry down Milwaukee to Damen Avenue, turn the corner, and find our way under the Blue Line L train tracks and there, like bumping into an old friend, is a happy Eskimo enjoying a tasty treat: a small bunny with X-ed out eyes. Looking at Elisa in her furry parka and snowsuit with the Eskimo beside her, it seems like a kind of dream-like self-portrait. We take some pictures of Elisa beside her creation and hurry back to the gallery.

Carrying the ladder, I start to think how easy public art is. It's a small, kind gesture; it makes you feel nice. Elisa Harkins' work, though not overtly political, is a strike at the heart of monotony. It offers lucky viewers a chance to both pause and daydream. It's from such moments of surprise that the best strategies and deepest realizations are often made.

Walking back along Milwaukee Avenue, Eskimo number five is still up above the old liquor store crying all alone, charming and sad and sweet. The nails in her foam coat look less like metal and more like tiny, glittering diamonds. We carry the ladder and the hammer and nails. Our faces are cold. Everyone is smiling. ©



BY ANDY RATHBUN ILLUSTRATION BY NADINE NAKANISHI

Bidding Wars

As funding gets tight, not-for-profit arts organizations turn to online auctions to help raise money.

Kids are invisible east of the Anacostia River in Washington, DC. They aren't doing drugs. They haven't killed anyone. They've done nothing to attract attention. They're just playing around broken glass in back alleys. "That's our population," explains Mary Brown, director of operations at Life Pieces to Masterpieces. "You don't really see them until they do something."

But Life Pieces, a creative arts organization that attempts to raise the visibility of DC-area African American boys aged three to 21, needs money to do their important work. The nonprofit had tried raising funds through a live auction of its student's artwork in the past, but the event was only moderately successful. The profit was undercut by catering fees, entertainment costs, booking a barker. There was too much overhead and too much trouble.

So Brown did what many nonprofits are doing: She bid live auctions goodbye, and jumped online.

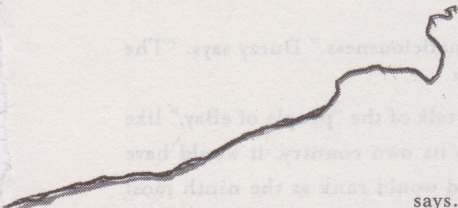
Life Pieces needed all the help it could muster. A struggling, community-level organization, it works with boys and young men in low-income and public housing. The organization says 90 percent of its apprentices—its clients—do not have a father or other positive male role model in their homes. According to Brown, the crime- and drug-ridden neighborhoods they come from are breeding grounds for trouble.

"To make our boys not do drugs is deviant," Brown says. "To our boys, talk about abstinence, of safe sex, is deviant. To our boys, talk about positive decision making—that's totally deviant."

And for Brown, it was a bit deviant to go online to raise money for such hands-on work.

"One of our committee members, Kathy Freshley, suggested an online auction," Brown recalled. "We thought it would be exciting."

Two auctions would be held. One would be live, like Life Pieces had done in the past. The other would be a two-week long Internet auction through eBay.



"We fared better online," she says. "We made \$2,000 more."

Life Pieces' apprentices are happy for the help. The organization, centered on the arts, serves to stir the artistic tendencies of its apprentices. They create art to raise self-esteem, build technical confidence, and inspire creative thought. By doing this, the organization hopes to inspire kids to succeed in whatever field they choose.

And the kids are eyeing quite a few fields: one wants to play football, another hopes to become a lawyer. If there's an overarching theme to their goals, it's summed up by Alenzo Jenkins, who says Life Pieces is helping him become "a strong black man."

Certainly Life Pieces deserved the money it raised—and not only because of the difficulties its apprentices face. The 10 items up for auction, each a piece of apprentice-created art priced at \$400, were worth every penny.

The paintings have a vaguely expressionist feel evoked mainly by the process used in their creation. The apprentices use acrylic paints to make colored scraps of canvas that are sewn on to a fresh canvas, creating vague, expressive figures that touch upon the cultural issues faced in their neighborhoods.

Most works speak to the anxieties of life on the streets. The reds and blues of "Mourning," for instance, seethe with the anger of loss. The painting shows a boy crying as a figure stands behind him, perhaps an image of a fallen friend, perhaps a person offering consolation.

Then there's the political disgust of "Boys Day Out," which finds five black figures facing two jets that swoop from a dark blue sky. Between the aircraft is a large banner reading "White Power." A swastika is below the slogan.

That piece contrasts starkly with "America What About Your

Children," a more hopeful plea for racial harmony. The painting is of an altered US flag, where the white stripes have been replaced with cloudy blues, and each white star is now a colored stick figure—some are black, others green, still others yellow.

More and more, groups like Life Pieces are going online to raise money. For example, since 1995 users on eBay have donated or raised at least \$35 million for the 3,000-odd charities and nonprofits registered with the site.

In 2003, eBay teamed with Giving Works, to create another way for nonprofits to raise funds. After providing proof of their nonprofit status, an organization is put on a list for sellers to select from. These auctioneers can then tithe money from their sales—anywhere from 10 to 100 percent—to registered organizations.

Outside of this tithing program, Internet auctions have plenty of benefits, which Brown lists handily:

- No catering: "You don't have to feed people."
- Smaller staff: "You don't have to have an auctioneer."
- More time to sell the items: "It's available online for two weeks."
- Getting attention is easy: In addition to distributing postcards, Brown sent out an e-mail, and asked people to forward the message: "It's kind of like an e-mail tree or something."

According to Hani Durzy, a spokesman for eBay, charity auctions let sellers associate with a good cause so auction items become more attractive to buyers. The price may go higher as a result, and that additional money will fill deserving coffers.

Of course, registering with eBay doesn't guarantee an outpouring of wealth. Well-known causes, like the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network or the ACLU, might attract donations, but under-the-radar organizations struggle to raise their profile. Just ask Cathy Hernandez, executive director of the Latin Arts Association (LAA) of Fort Worth.

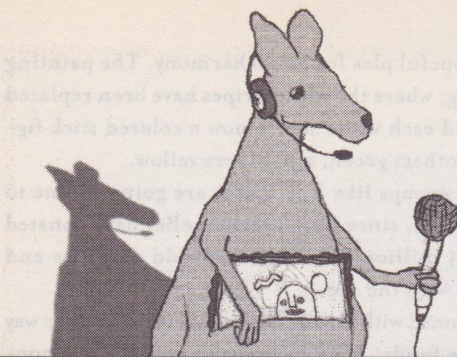
A nonprofit with hopes of becoming a nationally recognized tour stop in the city, the LAA serves as the area's resource center for Latin arts and culture. Though the LAA went through the "simple" process of registering with Giving Works about six months ago, the organization has yet to become any eBay user's beneficiary.

Hernandez hoped to raise the LAA's profile a bit this spring with an online auction of their own. By planning an online auction, she says the LAA had found "the best of both worlds. All the money we raise goes to helping the arts community, and if we do it well, it would open their work up to people who are interested in folk artists to a whole new audience."

Hernandez is optimistic. LAA has done live auctions before, but with the same middling results as Life Pieces—as well as the same problems—spending about \$500 on food and decorations "because people won't come out unless you make it a big to-do."

Events are "definitely labor intensive," she says. "For a small organization like us, when you have an organization like eBay that takes the blood, sweat, and tears out of it, it makes it better."

Hernandez hasn't made all the final decisions for her auction by press time, but knew she wanted to increase the profile of her website. She wasn't sure if eBay was the best way to do that and was



It's a worldwide buying community, so nonprofits can compete with a Fortune 500 company.

toying with the idea of having the auction on her own site to insure an increase in traffic.

Brown's results with the Life Pieces auction offer one endorsement for choosing eBay. During Life Pieces' auction, visitors to the site donated \$1,000 without even placing a bid on the apprentice's artwork, which "was really strange, but definitely welcome," she says.

"They would click over to our website and would be interested," Brown says. "They didn't buy the artwork, but they gave a contribution."

Part of Brown's success, however, traces back to promotion like that aforementioned e-mail tree. Life Pieces is well known in the DC area—it's won a handful of community service awards—so awareness, not eBay, almost assuredly aided its auction's success.

According to Stephanie Roth, editor-in-chief at *Grassroots Fundraising Journal*, traffic for an Internet auction only hits fever pitch if the item being sold is enticing to buyers unfamiliar with the charity. "Otherwise it's just like everything else," she says.

Roth says the principles to staging a successful online auction have little to do with using a particular website, saying the more popular sites like eBay have "a glut" of charity items, while personal sites may be too unknown. She said organizations should stay focused on raising awareness about the sale to generate traffic. Also, she encouraged patience.

"If you have an auction on an annual basis, people start knowing more about it," she says. "It will build from year to year. The same effort every year nets more and more money."

Raising an organization's profile isn't the only hurdle for these in-need groups. Some troubles are more along the white-men-in-black-suits variety. Currently, the Federal Trade Commission lists fraud as its number one consumer complaint, and Internet auctions lead the category with more than 62,000 complaints last year.

While Betsy Broder, a member of agency's consumer protection bureau, was not able to cite if any of these complaints were for fraudulent charity auctions, she did know what went wrong with some of those 62,000 cases.

"[Buyers] may not receive the item," she said. "[Or it] may be of a far inferior quality than what was represented, or of a different character altogether."

With more than 4,000,000 listings posted on eBay every day, these sleights are bound to happen. Monitors try to keep an eye on suspicious listings and, if a charity item is posted against policy, it is hastily removed.

"It often isn't done out of maliciousness," Durzy says. "The people of eBay have good hearts."

It's a bit odd hearing Durzy talk of the "people of eBay," like when he notes that, if eBay was its own country, it would have a population of 135 million, and would rank as the ninth most populace nation in the world. (He failed to note that "eBaynians" would be a good name for the country's citizens.)

"What eBay does is create a level playing field for sellers of all sizes," Durzy continues. "It's a worldwide buying community, so nonprofits can compete with a Fortune 500 company."

This idea was echoed by one eBaynian, Adam Green.

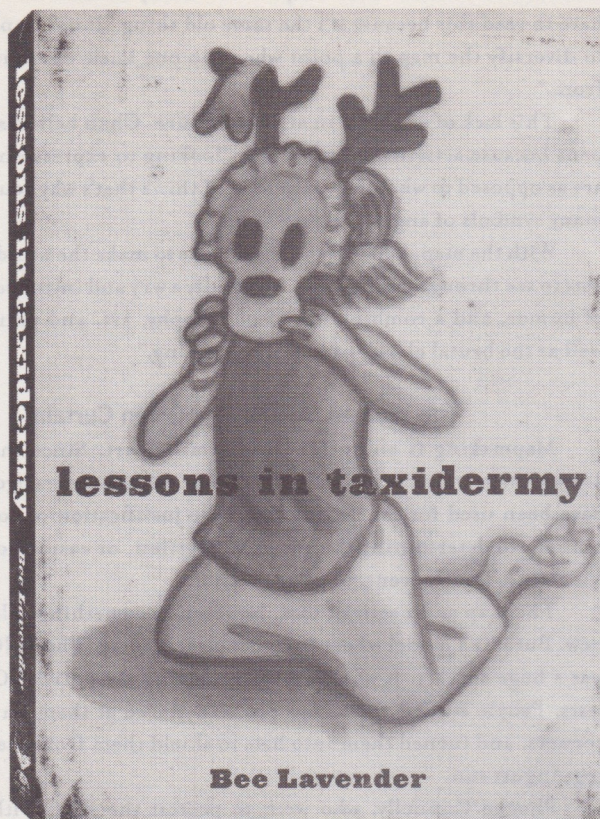
"Online auctions have the advantage of reaching people worldwide," Green says. "The competition is much greater because of this, thus the price usually will be much higher."

Green recently bought a signed Tiger Army LP, with his purchase aiding genocide relief in Sudan. Though he said the rarity of the item was the primary reason he bid on it, the charity also helped motivate his final bid of \$102.50.

"I was willing to spend a little more knowing it was going to a good cause rather than into some chump's pocket," he says.

For Brown, that money was a concern, initially. She was worried that selling her apprentice's artwork would send the wrong message to the kids. That's why, before staging any auctions—and she does plan on holding another soon—Brown made sure her apprentices understood why they were selling the paintings. She let them know that profit wasn't the goal. The goal was to increase awareness of their hard work at Life Pieces to Masterpieces.

"All our boys are very capable of going out and selling pretty much anything," she explains. "What we had to do was give meaning and help them understand that the power isn't in the dollar bill, it's in the work and message your getting out—that money is kind of a by-product of having your heart in the right place." ©



"Stunning" —*Bitch* magazine

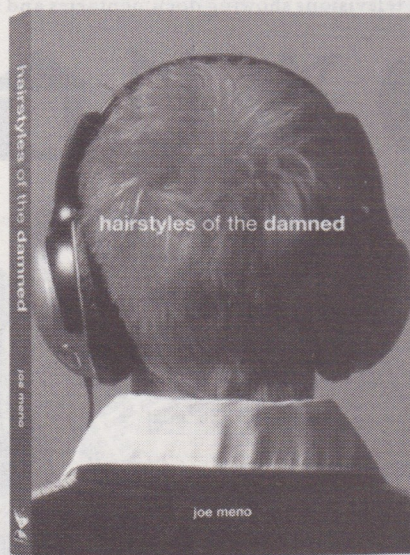
"Bee Lavender is a fantastic writer. Her work is deep and personal and I don't think there are any places she's scared to go. Reading her stories makes me feel brave, like I'm living a hard and infinitely redeeming life right along with her."

—Michelle Tea, author of *The Chelsea Whistle*

LESSONS IN TAXIDERMISTRY by Bee Lavender

Diagnosed with cancer at age twelve and perilously pregnant at eighteen, surviving surgeries and violent accidents: Sometimes you can't believe Bee Lavender is still alive; sometimes you think nothing could kill her. *Lessons in Taxidermy* is Lavender's fierce and expressive search for truth and an elusive sense of safety. This autobiographical tale is stark and resolved, but strangely euphoric, tying together moments and memories into a frantic, delicate, and often transcendently funny account of anguish and confusion, pain and poverty, isolation and illusion. While staying conscious of the particulars of her circumstances, Lavender frames her life in the context of history, traveling, landscape, and freak show culture. *Lessons in Taxidermy* is apocryphal, troubling, cathartic, and important.

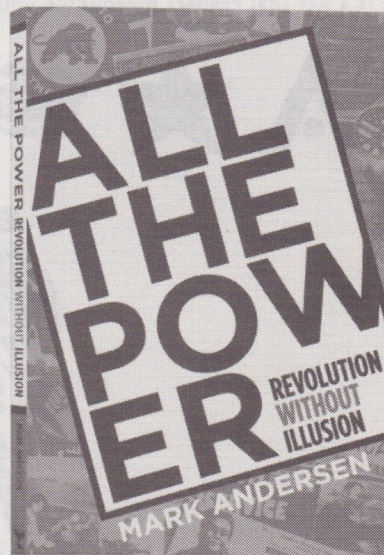
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Early last year, a tiny group of New York City artists and activists met for drinks at a karaoke bar to discuss how they could be most useful to the organizers planning to fill Manhattan's streets in protest of the 2004 Republican National Convention later that year. By the end of the night, the group—not one of them a cartographer and drunk by then anyway—had transformed themselves into a mapmaking committee and planned out *The People's Guide to the Republican National Convention*.

Artist and anti-war activist Paul Chan was among them. Chan remembers that after some discussion it became clear that what was needed was a comprehensive listing of what was going on during the convention—not only what was happening at the protest but what was happening at the convention itself. The guide they planned would highlight the temporary infrastructure of the convention: delegate hotels, reception halls and meeting spots. But the guide the envisioned would reach much further: Protest sites and dates were marked—bathrooms, bail bondsmen, free Internet sites, and cheap lodging too.

They mulled on the idea for a bit. "If this is the most secretive administration America has ever seen," Chan says the group was thinking, then they were going to make it "the most transparent convention ever. We decided the form it would take," he says, "would be based on the New York City subway map."

The group broke into three subgroups: an editorial group, a distribution group, and a design group. Chan led the map's design and recruited artists—known and unknown—to contribute to the map's beautification.

Chan worked hard to design something that would not contain all the familiar markings of contemporary activist art and literature. "There is a way that readers pigeonhole political work,"

he says. "The *Socialist Worker*, for example, has a look and feel and content and a form to it. People can readily dismiss it: 'I don't have to read this because it's the same old thing.' It was important to diversify the map to a point where no one knew where it came from."

This lack of aesthetic in activist culture, Chan believes, happens because activists are too often "looking to express who they are as opposed to what they want to be. I think that's why you see so many symbols of anger and rage."

With the map, Chan says, "my job was to make the world that I want to see through color, form, hopefully a wry and intimate sense of humor, and a combination of philosophy, art, and politics as well as the brutal clarity of what's happening."

The Woman Behind The Green Curtain

Mapmaking is an ancient and familiar art. Since the first known maps were carved into stone some 40,000 years ago, they have been used for everything from the justification of colonial plunder to determining the shortest, prettiest, or easiest route to a meeting, family event, or campground.

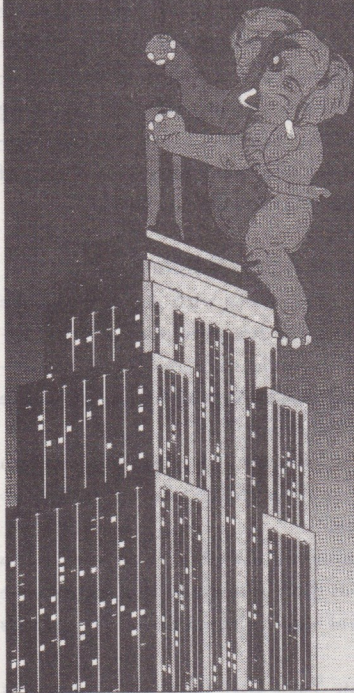
The map as an activist tool, however, is something relatively new. But it is a model whose time has clearly come. The RNC map was a huge success. It was everywhere during the anti-RNC protests. People stuffed them into pockets, stared at them on street corners, and turned them into hats to shield them from the searing August sun.

Phoebe Connelly, who went to protest the RNC with Human Television Network, a media activism group based in Chicago, found the map to be indispensable. Her group rode bikes mounted with televisions showing documentaries and video art all

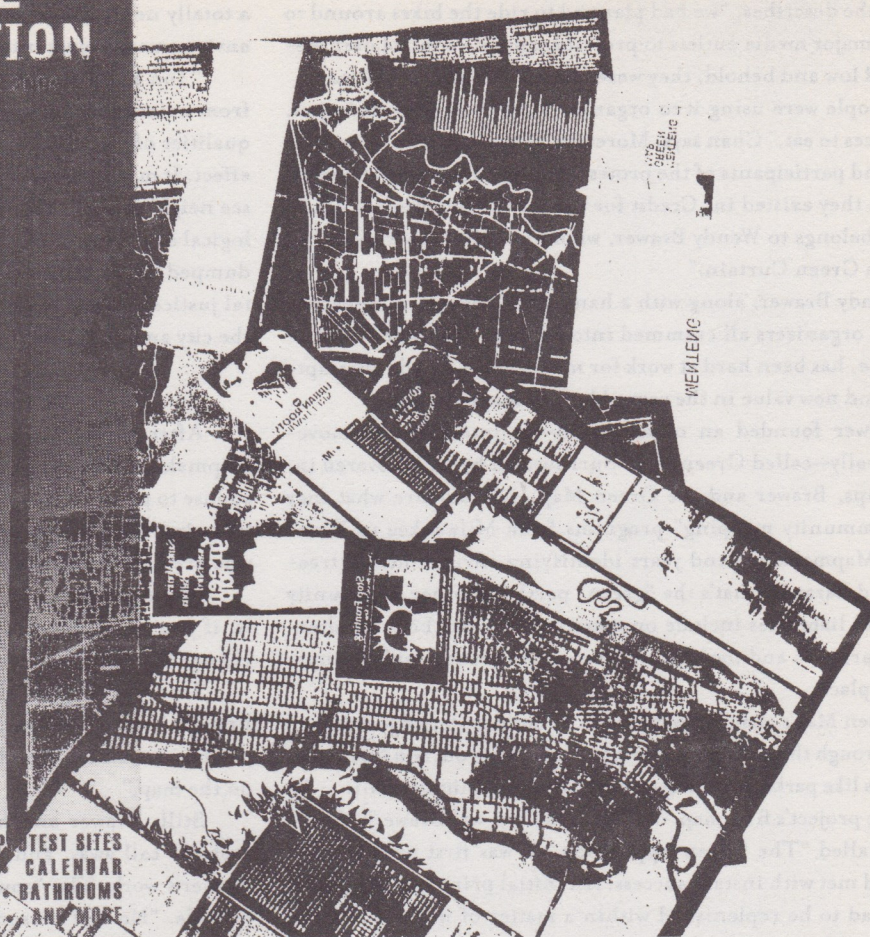


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MAPPING THE FUTURE

GREEN MAP AND COMMON GROUND EXPLORE NEW
TERRITORY IN THE LAND OF COMMUNITY-CENTERED
MAP-MAKING

by Jeff Guntzel

around protests throughout the opening weekend. "Our final day there," she describes, "we had planned to ride the bikes around to various major media outlets to protest corporate control over media—and low and behold, they were already marked on the map."

"People were using it to organize, find their friends in jail, find places to eat," Chan says. Moreover, it was coveted as an object to remind participants of the protests and the desperate historical moment they existed in. Credit for the map's effectiveness, Chan insists, belongs to Wendy Brawer, whom he calls "the woman behind the Green Curtain."

Wendy Brawer, along with a handful of designers, researchers, and organizers all crammed into a Lower East Side Manhattan office, has been hard at work for more than a decade, attempting to find new value in the very old art of mapmaking.

Brawer founded an organization—an international movement, really—called Green Map. Surrounded by walls covered in, well, maps, Brawer and the Green Map crew nurture what they call "community mapping" programs from Milwaukee to Hiroshima. Mapmakers spend years identifying environmental treasures and hazards (that's the "green" part) and other community assets and liabilities include on maps that become both an alternative narrative and tool for an intense connection and commitment to place.

Green Map's goal, Brawer says, is to build sustainable communities through the collaborative work of searching out and highlighting assets like parks, recycling centers, or community gardens.

The project's first map, of New York City, was Brawer's brainchild. Called "The Green Apple Map," it was first published in 1992 and met with instant success. An initial print run of 10,000 copies had to be replenished within a matter of months and the map is still kept in print today. Today there are more than 275 Green Map projects underway in 44 countries. There are more than 180 published Green Maps, and more than one million printed copies.

Green Map's cluttered Manhattan office receives about a call a week from a person or group wanting to do a Green Map of their neighborhood or city. To make the process friendly to mapmakers from different cultures and countries, Brawer and a growing network of Green Mappers have devised a universal visual language—a series of icons for whatever you need to create your own Green Map.

According to Brawer, the function of a Green Map is simple:

"It gives you a fresh perspective on where you live; you see it from a totally new vantage point." On a Green Map, she explains, the environment moves into the foreground.

"You know that first view of the earth we saw in the 1970s from outer space? It made us feel differently about the jewel-like qualities of where we were living. Green Maps can have that same effect. It makes people feel like this is really precious. You start to see neighborhoods that are really well connected in terms of ecological amenities and others that have nothing or in fact are being dumped on. So they're very good for thinking about environmental justice and the kinds of things that are working in one part of the city and why aren't they spreading out to the others?"

"We Don't Have A Lot Of Rules"

After more than a decade of working with eager first-time mapmakers, Green Map headquarters has developed a ritual response to proposed projects and inquiries: an e-mail full of questions intended to focus potential mapmakers and filter out those who are not "coming from the right place."

"We don't have a lot of rules," Brawer says, "but one of them is, if you get sponsorship, that sponsor doesn't have any right to change the content of your maps."

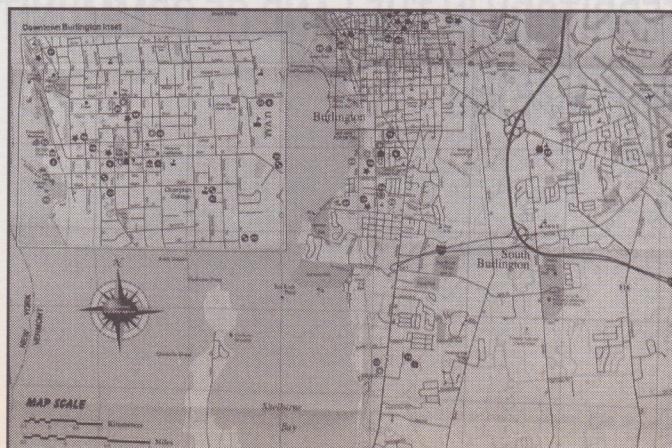
Transparency—or the absence of invisible hands—is key to Brawer. "Ideally, people spell out their criteria so that the average person can understand how sites were selected and what appears on the map."

Still, Brawer and her New York City crew are always just a phone call away, and cartographic counseling is a big part of Brawer's work. The "community" in community mapping is inevitable. "No one person has all the skills needed," Brawer says. "It's actually quite a difficult undertaking." When eager first-time mapmakers propose overly ambitious projects, Brawer and her team are quick to talk them down to something more manageable. Start small is the mantra.

Once the scope of the project has been set, all of the questions discussed, and the rules agreed to, the project—which will carry the Green Map name—is released into the hands of its makers. Brawer insists on a de-centralized model that allows for each community to bring its own personality and concerns to the map and its creation. "Our materials are not prescriptive," Brawer explains. "They don't say, 'Here's how you do it'; they say, 'Here's how other people have done it.'"



**"WE ALWAYS LOOK BACK BEFORE WE LOOK FORWARD.
WHAT WAS THE HISTORY OF THIS LAND 100 YEARS AGO?
TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO? WHAT IS IT NOW? WHAT DO
WE VALUE? IT GIVES US THIS TRAJECTORY:
WHERE ARE WE GOING?"**



Here Comes Everybody

"If it's not on the map it doesn't exist, as far as institutional players and planners go," says community mapping evangelist Maeve Lydon, and so she urges communities engaged in struggles to map out their concerns, their hopes, and their reality.

Lydon has seen community mapping helpful in gentrification battles, the struggle for a community's access to adequate health care, and even the successful attempt of a small town seeking people's control of the town commons.

Green Map's Wendy Brawer says Lydon is "the guru" of community mapping. While Green Map's work tends to offer a snapshot of a community or city and lays heavy emphasis on the final product of the map itself, Lydon explores the potential powers of mapmaking.

Lydon works with the Victoria, British Columbia-based Common Ground, a community mapping and planning project. Before immersing herself in the world of community mapping, Lydon worked for over 20 years in community and international development.

Community mapping, Lydon says, is nothing new. Communities are mapped all the time. But, she adds, echoing Brawer's grassroots sentiment, "it's not necessarily involving the community."

"We're trying to employ mapmaking and maps as a tool for community vision," she says. "Sometimes we work with a community for months and sometimes it's just a one-off thing at a school."

The objective is always the same: trying to get at what community members "think is important in their community," Lydon explains. To get at this, she asks questions like, "What services do you use, what would you like to have happen, and what are you prepared to do about it?"

The theory behind all of this, Lydon says, boils down to "the pedagogy of transformation and what has happened to what we call knowledge—how it has become specialized. I look at eco-systems and community systems and both get destroyed by us saying that certain types of knowledge are more valid than others."

Still, Lydon sees beyond the process. "We got very interested in the product, too," she agrees, but adds: "having a beautiful visualization of what you think the world is and how you think it should be is a great way to get people mobilized."

You're really bridging design and learning—design and visioning. Maps have power. They represent reality. And so the idea of community mapping is to re-present reality using people's knowledge and eco-system characteristics and other things we don't think about."

Putting Lydon's theory to practice often means recovering lost histories.

"With North America," Lydon says, "we look at indigenous title to land and what happened. Lewis and Clark just came along and put their own name on the knowledge they got from the indigenous people—they're the ones who drew the original maps for the explorers."

"What gets displaced is the point," she adds. "We always look back before we look forward. What was the history of this land 100 years ago? Two hundred years ago? What is it now? What do we value? It gives us this trajectory: where are we going?"

In many communities, the "where are we going" part is often preempted by market-driven forces more interested in the promise of profit than the bonds of community.

Lydon points out that the development of most communities—regardless of the nature of that development—is based on maps, and it shouldn't just be planners who have access to them.

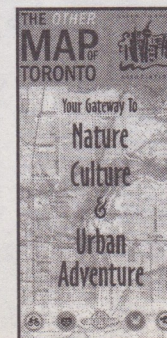
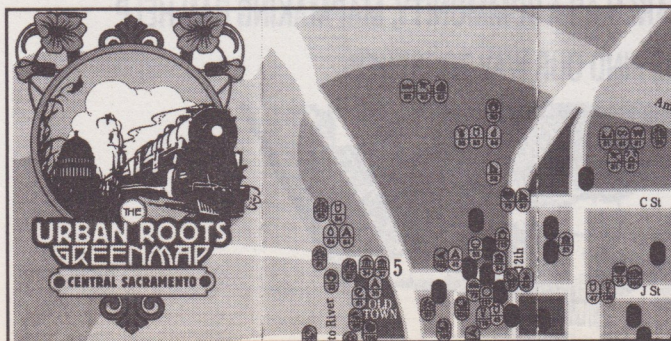
"They're an inventory tool, but who does the inventory: that's the question," Lydon asks. "We all have mental maps. They're how we navigate our lives." Community mapping not only re-establishes who does the inventory of a community, but "puts those mental maps on paper and says: this is my world."

The resulting picture of those things a community values most has been, in Lydon's experience, a transcending tool and the work transcends normal social activist circles to attract a diverse wealth of participants.

"Doing this work you are always meeting very diverse people. Who doesn't get attracted to the word map? You get educators, designers, scientists; you get all of them. You don't get all the same crowd together. So it leads to things where you bring in artists. Artists hate meetings. They don't want to go to zoning meetings. Or designers. Or architects."

The result of all of this input and involvement is often something very different in tone and form from the more common community organizing tools of protests, petitions, and reports.

It's that "beautification of information" Paul Chan was talk-



ing about. It worked for RNC protestor Phoebe Connelly, who says, "The usefulness of the map was not just its content, but how well-integrated that content was into a beautiful, functional map. It is lovely, and exactly the sort of resource one would hope for from a thriving community that celebrates dissent."

Success Stories

Done right, a map can work silent wonders. The first NYC Green Map had a black X over the Central Park Reservoir. In a little-known report by a New York State agency, a chlorine storage facility near the reservoir had been listed as one of the state's nine facilities presenting the greatest risk of a toxic chemical accident. The map was published, and the chlorine was removed. "That's an example of what a Green Map can do," says Brawer. "It can get the public motivated and active on an issue—whether it's a challenge to people's health and safety or something really beneficial that's not being utilized enough or protected."

Human Television Network's Connelly provides an example based on her use of *The People's Guide*: "On Saturday we were scrambling to locate spare parts for the bikes. The map listed bike shops all over the city and it had excellent marking of public transportation—far better than anything provided by the MTA."

Brawer cites an example, too, of a map drawn up by young people in Brooklyn's Red Hook neighborhood. The map, called *Are We Trashing the Apple?* charted the proposed 5,000 garbage truck loads per day that then-Mayor Giuliani was planning to send to a proposed waste transfer station in Red Hook, a poor community of color. The map was part of a larger campaign that was ultimately successful: Giuliani's plan was cancelled.

Today Green Map is focusing intensely on work with kids.

"When you map something," Brawer says, "it becomes yours. It's a really nice way to have kids connect with their communities—even if they're not there forever. They learn that their daily actions matter. And it's a big esteem builder to have your map published. It's a wonderful tool for kids and it's very adaptable."

Lydon, for all her enthusiasm (when talking maps she becomes breathless, interrupts her own thoughts, and often speaks

in shorthand), sees potential in map-making not yet realized. "It doesn't really deal with capital flow—like globalization—that much. It's a great local tool and we're happy doing them and they're pretty little maps, but the activist in me says: How are we going to deal with the big picture? If Japan is importing most of the raw logs from Indonesia and that's going to basically decimate the eco-system, how do we put that on a map? Or do we have these nice little Green Maps of Indonesia and Japan that don't show international environmental issues?"

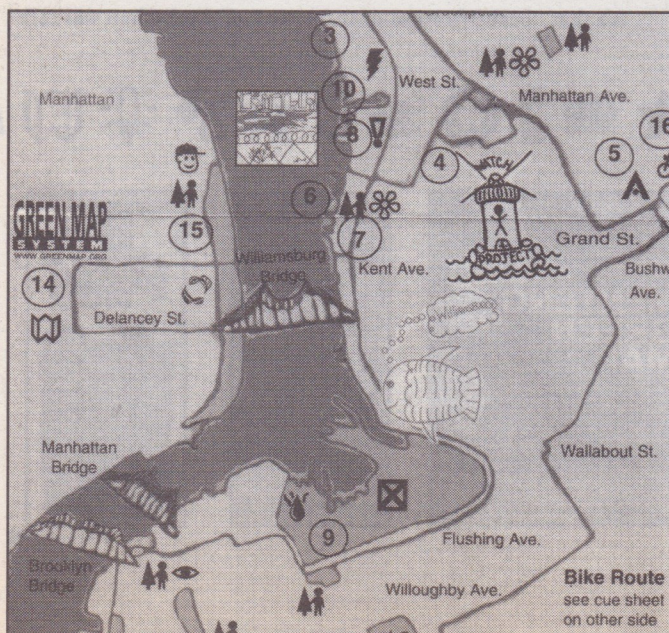
It is something she is hopeful to see discussed at the international Green Map and community mapping forums that are becoming regular events.

The work of Green Map and the practices of community mapping have been taken up all around the world: squatters in Argentina, students in Cuba, survivors of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the indigenous peoples of British Columbia and on and on.

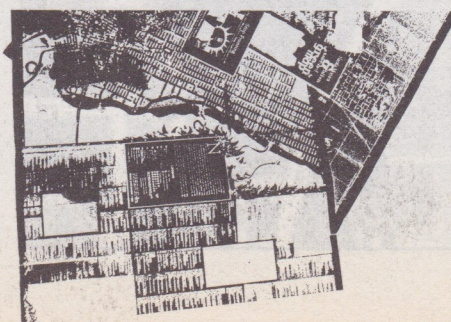
"Maps," Lydon wrote in *Alternatives Journal* in 2000, "can decide whose worldview and reality count . . . Since the advent of perspective geometry in the 15th century, followed by the rise of colonialism and the Scientific Revolution, mapmaking in the West has followed a utilitarian, scientific and technical tradition. Maps, rather than reflections of community—and traditional ecological and cultural knowledge—became possessions and instruments of power increasingly in the hands of those with colonial and commercial interests. Cartography soon became an indispensable tool of state and colonial power.

"We need to create new maps and theories about the places we call home, a new terrain not based on conquest but one of caring," Lydon concluded. "Mapmaking is a key vehicle and tool for transforming the way we see our world, our ecosystem, our neighborhoods. Undertaken together as a community, mapmaking can help us find our way together."

On the phone, at the end of our hour-long discussion about the potential and power of maps, she becomes a bit less poetic: "Who doesn't get excited about maps?" ☺



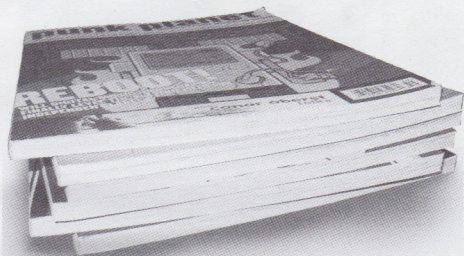
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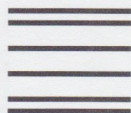


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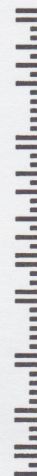


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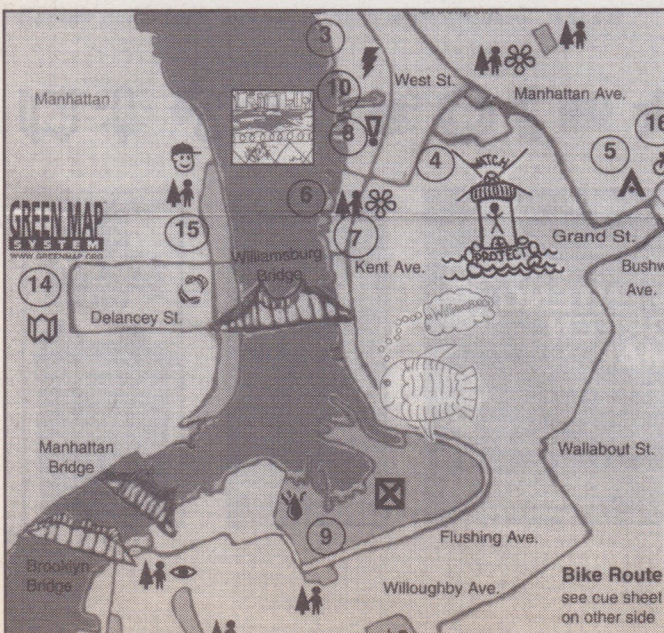
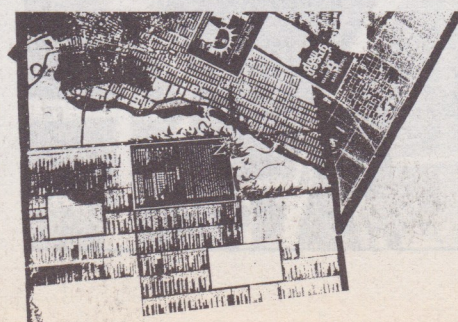
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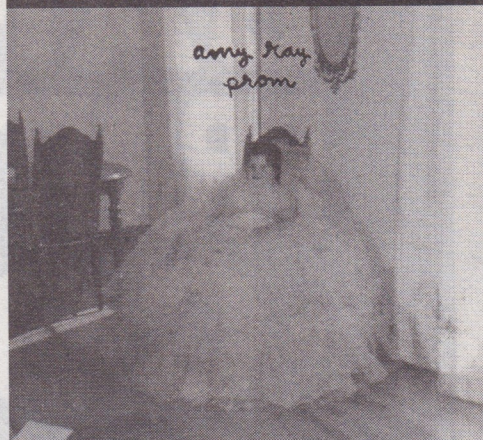


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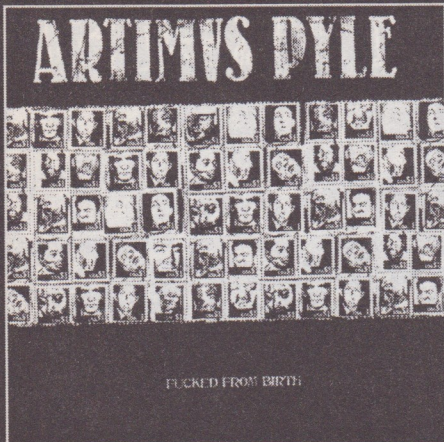
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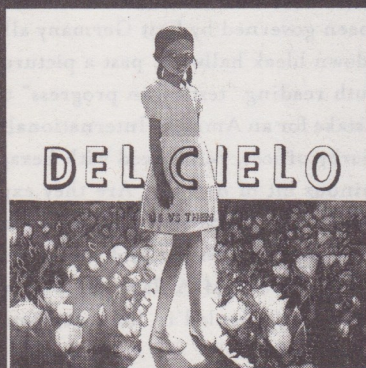
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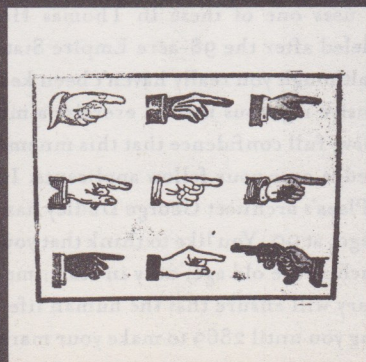


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US VS THEM



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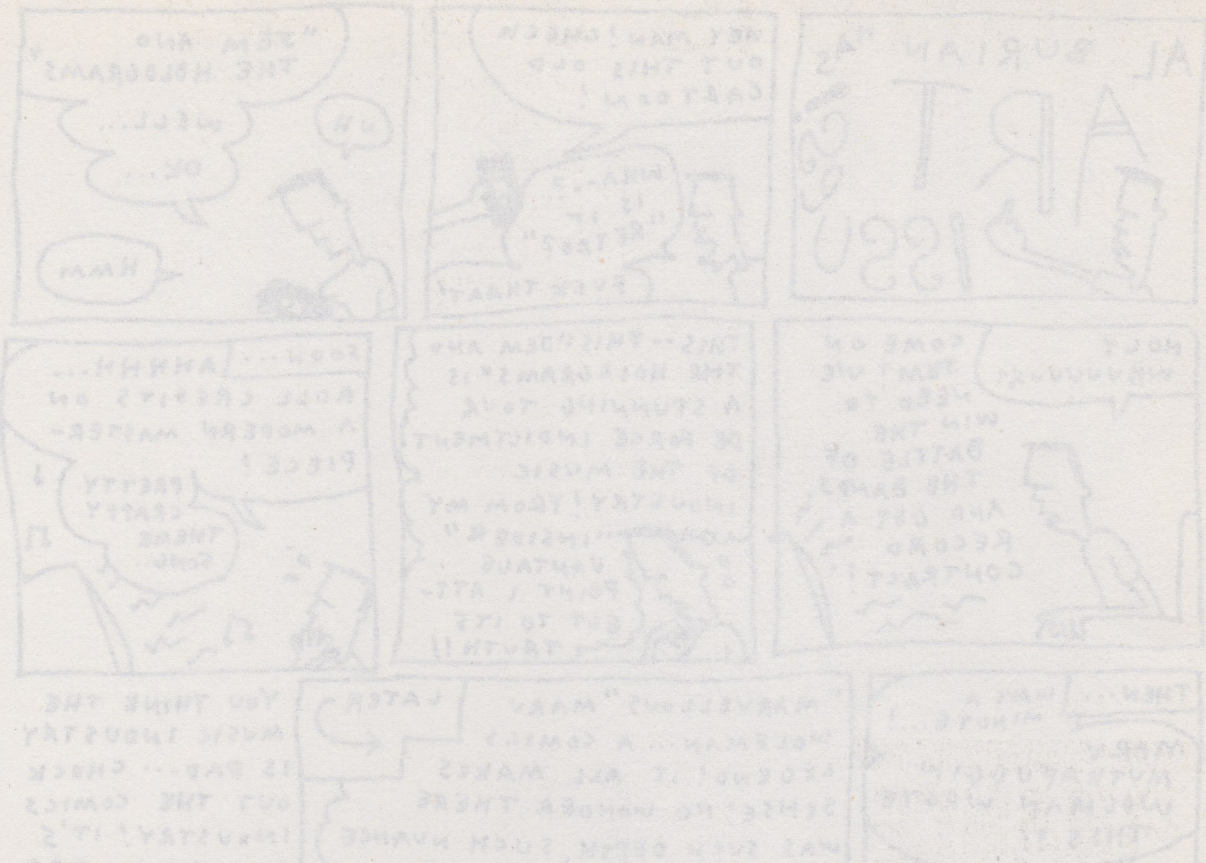
ABOUT THE POSTAL EXAM

There are a few things you will need to know before you take the postal examination:

- 1) The exam is being held at the City Of Industry Mail Processing Center this Wednesday, February 9, at 8:30 a.m.
- 2) You can't park in that spot, sir. You'll need to park across the street.
- 3) Because page three of the exam booklet you have been mailed reads *Come to the test physically and mentally prepared. Get a good night's sleep,* you will have been plagued by insomnia and nightmares of having to wash dishes naked at the Dischord House while young people laugh at you. The dog that bothered Son Of Sam will have been bothering you as well, all night long, from your neighbor's yard. The phone will have rung, once, at 12:55 a.m. In the morning, your drive down CA-60 will have been made in the haze of the undead. When news comes on the radio—virtuous anti-Nazi boxer Max Schmeling, dead at 99, is hailed as “a good man”; Christo’s “The Gates” installation wows millions in New York; the L.A. hotel workers union seeks to boost their bargaining power—every story will point irrefutably toward your own artistic and moral insignificance. This can be corrected by getting a good score on your postal exam.

Inside the testing center, your first peek ever behind the curtain of representative democracy, you will discover that America has secretly been governed by East Germany all these years. You will be lead down bleak hallways, past a picture of a man with a zippered mouth reading “testing in progress” that you will momentarily mistake for an Amnesty International poster. The safety glass of nearby offices, reinforced with hexagonal wire mesh, seems an ominous bit of overkill. Are they expecting violence? In the test room you will find rows of battered card tables and the cheapest sort of plastic furniture and a worn podium flanked by an American and a POW-MIA flag. You will suffer the distinct feeling of having been hauled in for detention (either Guantánamo or junior high).

But the test doesn't scare you. You have a secret weapon; the memory palace of 16th- century Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci. Hannibal Lector uses one of these in Thomas Harris's Hannibal. Yours is modeled after the 98-acre Empire State Plaza, in Albany, NY, and although you really haven't been keeping up with the years of intensive rigorous mental exercise a memory palace demands, you have full confidence that this mnemonic leverage will give you the edge over your fellow applicants. In a strange coincidence, the Plaza's architect George Dudley has just passed away, not two days ago, at 90. You like to think that you too will be passing away at such a ripe old age, only in scale; medical advances of the 21st century will ensure that the human life span is extended tenfold, giving you until 2869 to make your mark on society. This



test, taken in the mere preamble of your long, 900-year life, will be a breeze.

Today is Ash Wednesday. What does it say about the demographics of the postal system that no ashy foreheads are in attendance? Does the USPS discriminate against practicing Christians? A paranoia will grip you. What are you thinking, coming to this test physically and mentally unprepared, not having gotten a good night's sleep? You will remember something the late Tim Yohannon once told you about arriving for his Vietnam physical "zonked out" on no sleep with "shit" rubbed in his hair. Is that what you are trying to do here? Flunk the physical? You calm down; you don't have shit in your hair. Everything will be fine. You will be gripped with a sudden and intense desire to not disappoint your friends or family or the POW-MIA's still languishing in bamboo prisons overseas (earlier, when you called J___ of the Rah Bras, hours after \$20,000 worth of equipment had been stolen from their locked van in Brooklyn, NY, the very first thing he had said was *did you take the test?*).

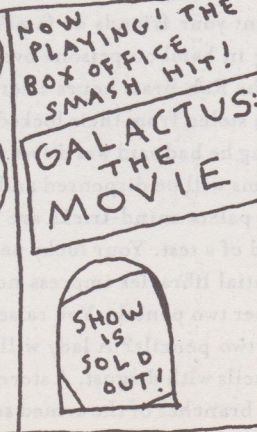
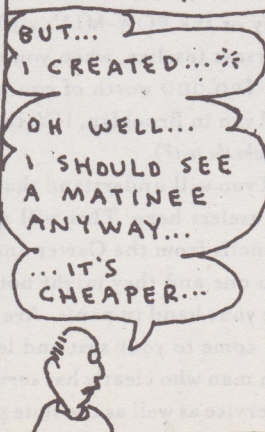
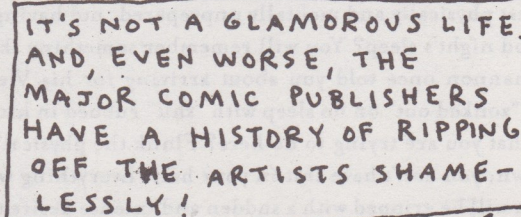
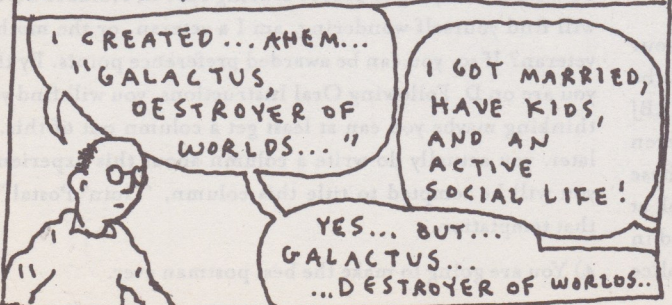
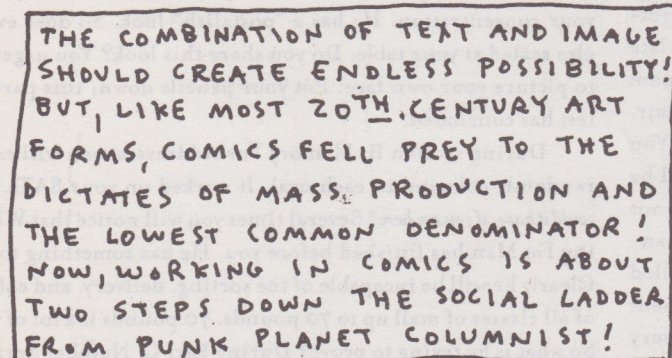
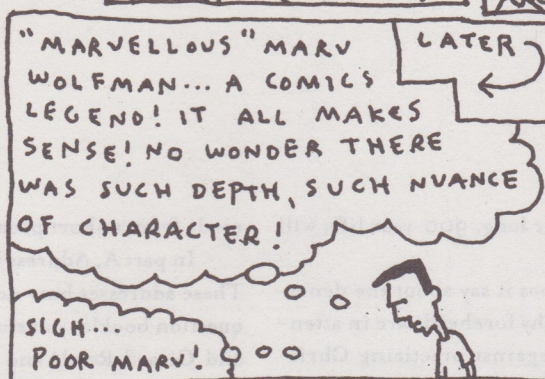
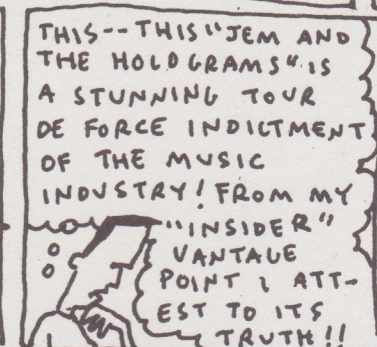
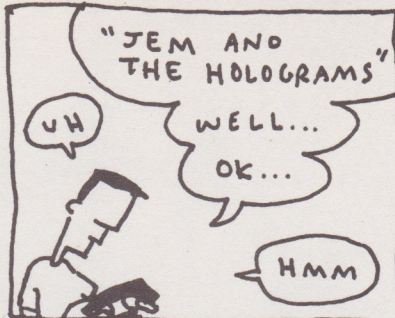
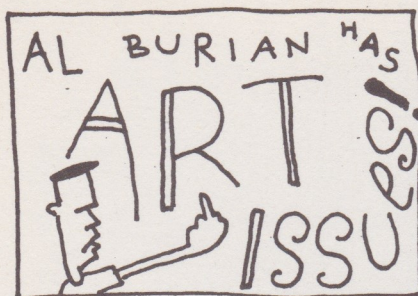
Forms will be dispensed and you will understand that your memory palace mind-tricks are useless here. This will not be that kind of a test. Your lucky pencils from the Carter and LBJ Presidential libraries impress no one and they might not even be number two pencils. You raise your hand in panic. Are these number two pencils? A lady will come to your seat and look at your pencils with disgust. A stern man who clearly has served in all three branches of the armed service as well as the state police

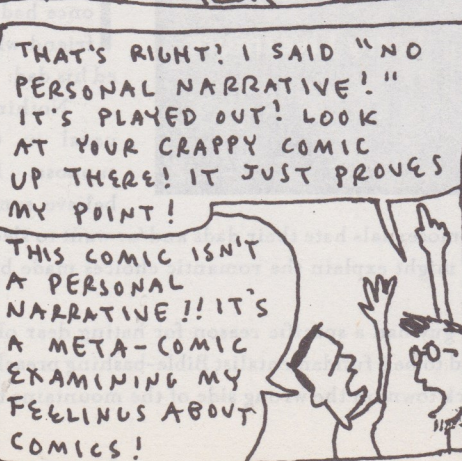
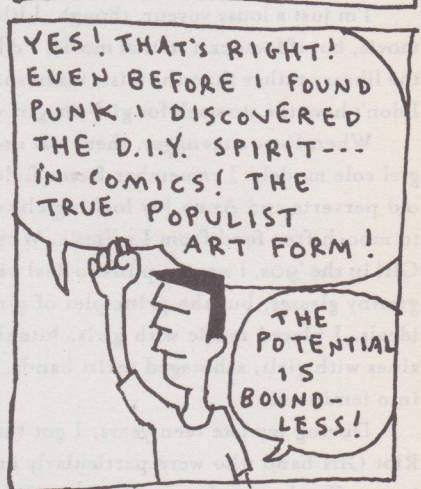
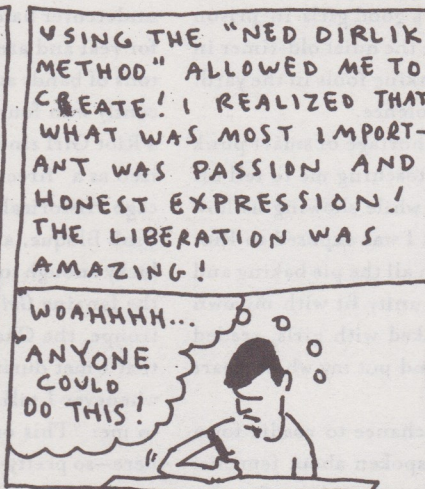
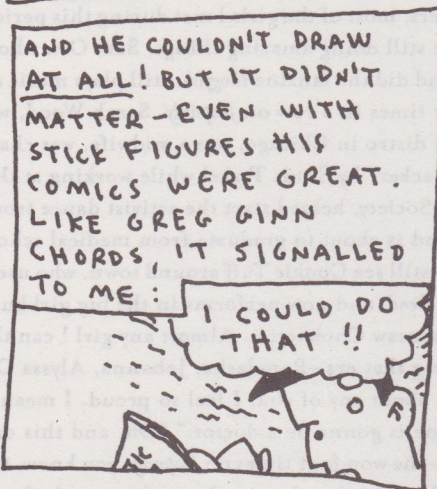
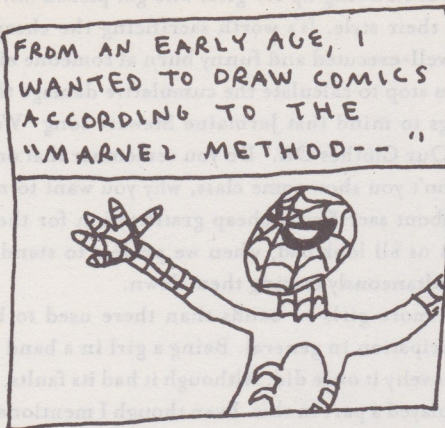
reads from a short preamble, and then the test has begun.

In part A, Address Checking, you will suffer some confusion. These addresses bear no similarity to the addresses in the sample question booklet you studied at home. Where are Warnock Street, and Girard Road, and Markland Avenue? A fat guy seated not quite directly opposite you will whisper wetly to himself, smashing your concentration. He has a "postalish" look. So does everyone else seated at your table. Do you share this look? You urgently try to picture your own face. Put your pencils down; this part of the test has concluded.

During section B, Memory For Addresses, you will consider randomly coloring in each oval. It worked on your SATs. *But how could it have, if you are here?* Several times you will notice that Whispering Fat Man has finished before you. He has something to prove. Clearly he will be incapable of the sorting, delivery, and collecting of all classes of mail up to 70 pounds. 70 pounds is a lot of weight. So what is he trying to prove? During Part C, Number Series, you will find yourself wondering, am I a veteran, or the mother of a veteran? If so, you can be awarded preference points. By the time you are on D, Following Oral Instructions, you will find yourself thinking maybe you can at least get a column out of this. Weeks later, you actually do write a column about this experience and you will be tempted to title this column, "Goin' Postal." Avoid that temptation.

4) You are going to make the best postman ever.







walk. In my former ignorance, I didn't know that a cheap weave sometimes slips out on its own accord. I thought girl hair lying on the ground could only mean one thing: cat fight. Two girls going buck on each other at the bus stop. An intercepted love letter to someone else's boyfriend ending in ripped clothes and a busted tooth.

I'm just a lousy voyeur, though. I like a good girls-in-prison movie, but if I was cast in that movie, I'd be the quiet old-timer in the library rather than the feisty vixen shanking fools in the yard. I don't have the stomach for girl-on-girl violence.

When I was a teenager, there was no shortage of smart punk girl role models. I remember Becca Bolo teaching me to tell off old perverts and Anna Joy looking classy while showing us how to mooch free food from La Fiesta. When I was exposed to Riot Girl in the '90s, I was too punk to deal with all the pie baking and granny glasses, but the principles of girl unity fit with my own ideals. I played music with girls, hitchhiked with girls, traded zines with girls, sabotaged sexist bands, and put my whole heart into feminism.

During my late teen years, I got the chance to roadie for a Riot Girl band who were particularly outspoken about feminist issues. On the way down to Los Angeles, we stopped at a favorite Riot Girl eatery, Taco Bell. As we sat down at a table with our trays full of 59-cent slop, one of the girls left to go to the bathroom. The second she was out of earshot, the other girls turned to each other and enthusiastically began talking shit about her. Specifically, about her big butt!

"At least she's not wearing the yellow pants!"

"Does anyone have a spoon? J_____s wearing shorts. Cottage cheese for everyone!"

I was shocked. Could it be these pioneers of Riot Girl were merely . . . perpetrators? It's embarrassing to think about how naive I was, but I felt as though the girl love rug had been yanked out from underneath me. It was my first harsh exposure to the phenomenon of catty feminists.

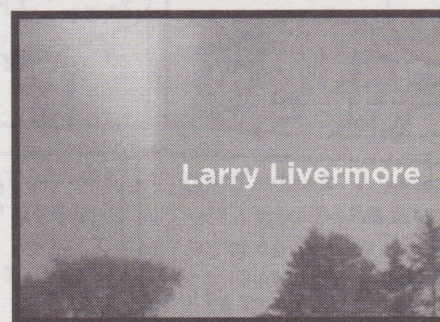
More than a decade has passed since then and my cage is not rattled as easily as it once was. I find the idea of catty feminists sometimes funny, sometimes mortifying. But mostly I think about how to deal with this stuff. For instance, how can you be supportive of a woman who you are annoyed by as a person, but who shares similar values as you? What kind of shit talking is OK? Who is it OK to talk shit with? Is it OK to talk shit if you need to vent? Is it OK to talk shit if you know it's going to be really, really funny? Is there such a thing as constructive shit talking? I think we all need

Better than a penny or a four-leaf clover, I used to feel so lucky whenever I would spot a hair extension lying haphazardly on the side-

to be brave about standing up for girls who get picked on, even if we're not into their style. It's worth sacrificing the cheap thrill provided by a well-executed and funny burn at someone else's expense when you stop to calculate the cumulative damage that may occur. It brings to mind that Jermaine Stewart song "We Don't Have To Take Our Clothes Off." Do you remember that one? "So c'mon baby, won't you show some class, why you want to move so fast?" It's all about sacrificing cheap gratification for the larger good. It makes us all look bad, when we profess to stand up for girls while simultaneously tearing them down.

There are more girls in bands than there used to be, and more girl participation in general. Being a girl in a band doesn't seem like the novelty it once did. Although it had its faults, I think that Riot Girl played a part in this. Even though I mentioned some undercover haters, most of the girls I met during this period were for real and are still doing amazing things. Sam Ott, who was in tons of bands and did the fanzine *Kingfish*, still plays music and recently won four times in a row on *Jeopardy*. Sarah Wood, who ran a Riot Girl zine distro in Chicago, was a midwife, was characterized as a "firecracker" by Studs Terkel while working at the Chicago Historical Society, helped start the activist dance troupe the Pink Bloque, and is about to graduate from medical school. I'm lucky enough to still see Cookie Tuff around town, who used to do the fanzine *Girl Fiend*, and now performs in the big girl burlesque troupe, the Chainsaw Chubbettes. Almost any girl I can think of that I met during that era—Ramdasha, Johanna, Alyssa Chunx—whenever I talk about any of you, I feel so proud. I mean, listen to me: "This one is gonna be a doctor." "Oh, and this one over here—so pretty—she won four times on *Jeopardy*, you know. Can you imagine?" I've become that deranged grandma on the bus, busting out a dictionary-sized photo album stuffed with snapshots of her grandchildren, forcing strangers to look at them and admire the accomplishments of women they don't even know.

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THE SMOKING BUDDHIST

I once had a boyfriend who hated his dad.

Nothing unusual in that, I suppose. If you believe some "experts," all homosexuals hate their dads and/or want to sleep with them, which might explain the romantic choices made by many gay men.

But this guy had a specific reason for hating dear old Dad, who happened to be a fundamentalist Bible-bashing preacher in a backwater hick town on the wrong side of the mountains that di-

vide coastal California from the vast, baking nothingness of the Central Valley.

This was a good while ago, sometime in the mid-'70s, but fundamentalist preachers seem to have always felt similarly about effete gay sons with long blond hair: they could go to hell or San Francisco, whichever came first, and which amounted to the same thing, anyway.

So David (not David the Philosopher, about whom I've written before, who loved his Dad and, what do you know, eventually turned out not to be gay!) decided that those things being equal, he'd try San Francisco. That's where I met him, grinning like a hippie love child in the Stud Bar, not the sort of place where people usually did much grinning.

To be honest, it got on my nerves, that half-blissful/half-idiot smile of his. Didn't he know this was the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post-energy crisis 1970s? Cheerfulness was not only out of fashion; it was downright annoying.

To be even more honest, that goofy, don't-worry-be-happy look was only half the reason things didn't last too long between us. The other half was religion.

I should have seen it coming, but I don't know how I could have. When I first knew him, the one thing he talked about more than hating his dad was how stupid and evil religion was. He could still smile while telling me what a hypocritical bastard his dad was, but once he got started on how religion in general and Christianity in particular were poisoning the world, clouds of fury gathered across that otherwise placid face of his until he looked almost scary.

So what was I supposed to think when he told me he'd started visiting the local Buddhist temple to "learn how to meditate"?

"But I thought you hated religion," I innocently stated.

"This is different," he said.

"Yeah, their mumbo-jumbo is in another language," I argued. I didn't have the heart to tell him something else I knew about that particular Buddhist temple: that the money for it had been donated by some major league LSD dealers in exchange for being allowed to hide their stash there when the Feds were hot on their trail.

I hadn't always been so cynical about the religions of the Mysterious East. Like many hippies, I'd been through my own phase of rejecting Mom and Dad's religion as patriarchal and oppressive nonsense and then replacing it with a drug-addled hybrid of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism that focused on becoming "enlightened," in touch with "my true self," and taking lots of drugs.

But that had been at the beginning of the '70s. By the time I met David, I'd decided that the various swamis and gurus who had descended upon San Francisco and New York and wherever else the counterculture gathered were more attracted by the money and influence to be gained from gullible hippies than by any deep, abiding spiritual mission.

Maybe it was when the head honcho of the Berkeley Hare

Krishna temple got caught with a load of guns and drugs in the trunk of his Mercedes, maybe when the Buddhists rented out their temple as a drug stash, maybe when the Transcendental Meditation™ instructor tried to rape a friend of mine. And maybe I was just naturally cynical, but for the rest of the '70s and a long time afterward, religion and I lived on different sides of the street.

In the interests of open-mindedness and harmony, I went to a couple of David's meditation sessions, but didn't get much out of them. As far as I could see, we were just sitting there with our legs uncomfortably crossed, staring at a brick wall for what seemed an awfully long time. Every once in a while, the big cheese monk or whatever he was called would come around with a stick and whack us across the shoulders if we weren't sitting up straight enough or didn't appear sufficiently focused on whatever we were supposed to be focused on.

After that I didn't see David so often, and when I did, he never had much to talk about except what was new at the monastery. "We had a really great meditation session this morning," doesn't go far as a conversation-starter with me. Six months or a year went by, and I ran into David on Market Street with his head shaved.

"I've been ordained as a Buddhist priest" he gushed.

"Like father, like son," I couldn't help saying, even if it was a bit mean.

His face darkened momentarily, but nothing was going to dent his bliss for long, and he persuaded me to come down and visit him in his cubicle at the monastery, where he instantly, and rather clumsily, tried to have sex with me.

"Are Buddhist priests allowed to do that?" I asked, more to stall for time than anything else, because I wasn't enjoying myself.

"Why wouldn't they be?" he replied, as if I were a slow child.

"I don't know. Most religions aren't too keen on the sex-out-of-marriage thing. Especially the gay-sex-out-of-marriage-thing."

"Master Yakayama (or something like that; for some reason these guys all had Japanese names even though they were obviously white) always has his boyfriend over. Why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know, it's a little too kinky for me, sorry," and I was out of there, never to see David again, except for the time he gave me this beautiful framed mandala he'd made for me, which left me feeling a little guilty, but not enough to attempt monastery sex again.

And the reason I'm thinking about it now? I guess it was some of the punk rockers who've taken up Buddhism and other Asian religions in the past few years. It's weird, but despite hatred for hippies being one of the cardinal tenets of punkdom, the punk counterculture has followed an eerily similar trajectory to that of the hippies.

Just as with the hippies, the punks started out with an emphasis on unity and finding common ground with each other, only to fracture into a bewildering variety of special interest groups based on music, politics, clothes and personality. Just as

the women's liberation and gay liberation movements grew out of the '60s counterculture, the punks gave birth to riot grrrl and queercore. So it shouldn't be surprising when some punks relive the '70s in yet another way: by pursuing personal fulfillment and spiritual enlightenment.

Luckily I'm no longer as cynical as I used to be. In fact I'm almost disgustingly tolerant of people's religions and philosophies, as long as they don't misuse them to hurt or oppress others. But I'm still bemused by the spectacle of people rejecting the Christianity or Judaism they've grown up with, only to replace it with some Asian religion that's at least as bizarre and rigorous in its own way.

But whatever works, I say, and if chanting and meditating in some language you don't understand does more for you than praying in English, that's great. No doubt God, if he's up there, is fluent in all the earth's major tongues, and even if you don't know exactly what you're saying, presumably he does.

Besides, who am I to talk? One of the great things about being raised Catholic, at least in the old days, was that everything was in Latin, and prayers and chants always sounded more profound to me in that language than in boring old English. Unfortunately, a couple of the dumber recent Popes decided it would be better to translate everything into people's native languages, which left modern Catholic services sounding as pedestrian and anodyne as their Protestant counterparts.

Luckily, I live in London, a town run by and for harrumphing old fogies like myself, where many of the Catholic churches have ignored the Pope and continued to do everything in Latin. So I can attend Mass in a church built in the 13th century, and sing along with prayers and chants that haven't changed much since then. It's practically as though the Middle Ages never ended! Which makes me wonder if I've got more in common with fanatical Islamists than I'd like to imagine.

Friends sometimes ask me how I can have anything to do with the Catholic Church considering some of the horrible things it's done, but to me that makes about as much sense as asking how you can live in the United States of America (or, for that matter, the United Kingdom, or most other countries of the world).

People made noises about leaving the country if George Bush got re-elected, but I haven't seen anyone actually do it, and just because the Pope might be a dope doesn't mean I have to abandon a 2000 year-old institution that is far bigger and far more important than any of the evil and twisted individuals who have from time to time wielded power within it.

I do have a problem with Catholics who unquestioningly accept anything the Pope says because he's "God's personal representative on earth" or because he's "infallible." If you know anything about your Church history, you'll be aware that that whole "infallible" thing has only been around since the 19th century, and guess who it was that had the blinding revelation that the Pope could make no mistakes about faith and morals? Doh! No prizes if you guessed the Pope.

I have a similar problem with Buddhists who adopt a mindlessly reverential attitude toward their own Pope, the Dalai Lama. (I know not all Buddhists follow the Dalai Lama, and that plenty of them consider him just as much of a dingbat as some Christians think the Pope is, but I have neither the time nor the inclination to go into all the sects and subsects of Buddhism. Christianity is bad enough.)

"His Holiness," they call him (which incidentally is the same moniker the Pope goes by), and can you imagine what goes on in the mind of some guy who goes around insisting that people address him as "Your Holiness" rather than by his name? Maybe it's just me, but it sounds suspiciously like self-esteem issues are at work here.

I ran into one prominent punk-rock Buddhist at a café and was surprised to see him polishing off a hamburger, since he'd been vegetarian for as long as I'd known him. I was even more surprised after dinner when he lit up a cigarette.

"I've never seen you smoke before," I said.

"I know. I just started."

"But why? I mean, it's not like you're a teenager succumbing to peer pressure. And by the way, what made you decide to start eating meat?"

"My guru eats meat and smokes."

"Who's your guru?"

"His Holiness, the Dalai Lama."

Right, I'm thinking, and the Pope is my personal confessor. But open-minded, tolerant fellow that I've become, I said nothing of the sort, and only suggested that even if the Dalai Lama did smoke cigarettes, it probably wasn't as an aid to heightened spiritual awareness.

"He operates beyond the material plane," my friend said, "and what he does with his physical body is of no import. That's the way I want to live."

OK, now I don't claim to be an expert on Buddhism or meditation. The best definition I ever heard for meditation was from a Christian: "When we pray, we talk to god. When we meditate, we listen."

But I do know that meditation is central to the practice of Buddhism, and that central to the practice of meditation is breath. "Watch your breath," meditation instructors will tell you again and again. "Breathe in the essence of life and breathe out the toxic detritus of your sordid human existence," stuff like that.

So you tell me, how much sense does it make to spend your life meditating, which *ipso facto* means learning to breathe more deeply, to maximize the lungs' ability to absorb life-giving energy from oxygen, only to fill those spiritually enhanced lungs with a carcinogenic cloud of smoke? I don't think most Buddhists believe in the concept of sin, but if they did, poisoning yourself would have to be right up there on the list.

So who's dumber, the Dalai Lama for smoking, or his followers for imitating him? Of course we can bet that the Dalai Lama

has a much better health insurance plan than the average punk-rock Buddhist, so if he ends up with cancer at least he'll be well cared for.

But if he were any kind of spiritual leader, shouldn't he have the balls to say to the people who revere him, "Yeah, I smoke. I know, I'm a doofus, I've tried to quit but I just can't. The spirit is willing and the flesh weak and all that. But hey, all you good little Buddhists out there, that doesn't mean you have to be doofuses (doofi?), too. Quit smoking now, and if you don't smoke, don't start. Like Bob Dylan said, don't follow leaders, watch the parking meters."

Instead we get guff about material planes and physical bodies not being relevant, etc. Let's see how relevant they are or aren't when you get cancer and ask the Dalai Lama to pay your hospital bills. And yet apparently there's no shortage of people who take this arrant nonsense seriously.

If you have a problem—and what modern, rational person wouldn't?—accepting that bread and wine can be changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ by a priest saying some magic words over them, why would you find it any easier to believe that human beings could become magically immune to cancer-causing and consciousness-deadening tobacco smoke because they exist on a "higher plane?"

Well, as that great American, P.T. Barnum, famously said, "There's a sucker born every minute," and as I not so famously added, "With the population explosion, it's probably more like two or three these days." P.T. Barnum, I've just learned, used his proceeds from fleecing suckers to endow a major American university, Tufts. About the best I can offer by comparison is maybe persuading a Buddhist or two that it's not holy to smoke. We all do our bit.



FAKE SUMMER WITH REAL SNOW

After uncrunkling my limbs and shaking off the brain static from the plane ride

home, I nabbed my forever posse, Miles and Ben, and we made our way to "The Summer" themed dance party that folks were throwing at the skeezy Polish bar on Division. Dress for summer and you get in for \$3, \$8 fine for dressing "winter," explained the invite. We all were wearing parkas and looking casj winter fine, yet slunk in for three a pop through some hot talking—though I do not think Miles even paid, probably owing to his unholy look, a look conjuring Marc Bolan as a Crip, which floated him direct to non-payment standing. Seventies rock scum gone Compton suave says "I'm fucking carefree" with a particular sang-froid daring that is appox. infinity years into fashion-future.

The theme party was rife with the boozy and braless. One of the DJs, flashed us some thong, intern-style; we remained seated and unphased. The killer combo of sunglasses indoors, tit-mushing halter tops, top-40 hits, plastic beer cups and inflatable palm trees summoned ever '80s movie's party scene where the bougie kid's parents are out of town.

Or Chuck Klosterman's birthday party staged at a Sandals resort.

Ben and I slunk down at our table, Miles mingled. I nursed my tap water on the rocks, Ben his brown bottle. After six minutes, somewhere in the bridge of "Lean Back," our eyes glued with glum-smug fascination to the trainwreck of damaged grind ideas summoned by the freed azzes of the partytown's real party girls, Ben turns and says "You know, it really is true what they say about white girls and dancing." I slurped a yes out my stirstraw, in a bored kid fashion I have had down pat since 1980 and continued with my mute origami reworkings with the waxed paper Tootsie Roll wrappers, and thought about all the other things I'd rather be doing like catching up on back issues of *New Yorker* or fucking my boyfriend.

I only like real summer parties during the real summer. These winter parties are like a joke with no punchline. The songs and the drunken humpa humpa just go on forever.

28 years old feels just like 97 sometimes.

Stayed another 40 minutes past this, by apathy and by accident, out of having interminable strings of 90-second conversations with people whose names I should know by now. All of whom seemed surprised to see me and inquired about what I am doing in town, which made me feel both hermetic and worldly—as if spending a few weeks at a time in Minnesota were equivalent to "living abroad." This, perhaps, the deepest dream come true of notorious me—no one actually thinks I live here anymore.

Things were livened up considerably once Ralph, DBA DJ Major Taylor, hit the decks and brought his Philly party-rock deftness to the floor, cutting like a more prole Hollertronix. Three years into the dance-party 'splosion, and every amateur DJ who plays every party still doesn't know how to mind their levels, beat match or even blend safely (I am not entirely exempt from the wackness cadre, forgive my forked tongue). So it's nice to feel the choice caress of a DJ who cuts the hit by the bridge and gets you to the next song, which is better than the last . . . as opposed to giving you 14 seconds of silence followed by a techno remix of an ironically adored terrible pop song—a song choice which indicates that the DJ cannot actually tell the difference between good techno and bad techno because it's all just 'dance' music to them, usually followed by the forever shit sandwich of Billy Idol/the Rapture/The Cars—all the bands that make me wish for Old Testament god to hurry up and exact his wrath on the white people already.

Nonetheless, Ralph killed it with his skills-a, which more than made up for opening his set with "O.P.P"—which I view as the

sort of song you only play at wedding receptions (or proms) when the barf-drunk bridesmaids are shoeless and slipping around the parquet in their nude hose.

I spent the rest of the time silently tonguing Tootsie Rolls out of my molars and casually watching the bathroom lines, then getting angry and sad (and various toxic combos of the two) as people I know, including some bona-fide friends, slink Noah's Ark style, two by two, into the mens and ladies rooms and come out sniffing, mechanically jittery, grinding their teeth.

"Are people still doing cocaine?" I ask Ben, somewhat rhetorically.

"Yes. Everyone is still doing cocaine." He says flatly.

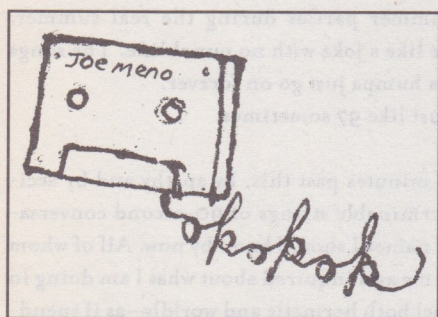
So, I stole the rest of the Tootsie Rolls off the table, cheek-kissed those I came with, and retreated home, abandoning my witness seat, as watching the smart, the talented, and the young and faltering cop out, trying to stave off that 30s reality-bite with a Simulac-cut bump really gets me down.

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New issue of Hit it or Quit it will return and be on newsstands by May. Consider yr self warned.



GHOST IN THE GRAVEYARD

On the Fourth of July, 1987, you were playing ghost in the graveyard. It was dark behind your grandparent's house. You were

visiting them for the summer. They lived in Indiana by a small lake. You had just turned thirteen. You had the indivisible belief that at any moment, you might be involved in having sex with somebody. It would just happen without any explanation, like finding a corner of the globe where, inexplicably, there was no such thing as gravity.

You were holding a girl's hand. The girl's name was Melissa which was your younger sister's name but you tried not to think of that. Your younger sister had dark hair and this Melissa, holding your hand, had hair that was soft and curly. It was the first time you remember ever holding a girl's hand. In the distance, fireworks were exploding like white and blue bouquets of light. For a moment, you saw her face and then it was only a shadow of your shaky imagination.

At the time, you did not really know the rules of ghost in the graveyard. It seemed like hide-n-seek but in the dark. Someone, somewhere in the night was shouting "One-two-three-ghost in the graveyard," and all of a sudden you and this girl were running.

You had practiced for this. You and your summer friends spent the night in some parent's beige conversion van, practicing

French-kissing with bottles of Pepsi. You made precise plans. You talked about girls like they were your enemies.

That summer you wandered alone in the woods for hours, with a compass and a small pocketknife. You had once surprised a small red fox as it ran through a thicket. You thought it reminded you of a girl as it disappeared back into the silent expanse of the knotty underbrush, small, shy, timorous. Another time you got lost and stumbled upon a yellow suitcase full of women's clothes. There were black nylon and garter belts and you were excited and terrified at the thought of someone ever wearing those things. Later, you believed you may have only dreamed that moment happening.

You were running in the dark, through the woods behind all the small houses, and you were holding hands. You climbed on top of someone's roof. You sat there and waited for her to ask to be kissed. You waited and waited and then one of your friends came by and said the game was over already. You helped the girl down and wondered what might have been. This was also a first: The first time in your life when you wondered how courage might have changed things.

At the end of the summer, Melissa would not look you in the eye. She would go out in a rowboat with a boy from the other side of the lake. You would not talk ever again. You feel strangely and profoundly sad when you discover she has committed suicide some 10 years later, a severely tragic case of post-partum depression. There will be fireworks at the end of the summer, too. You will stand on the shore and watch the girl and the boy in the small boat drifting beneath them alone. You will hold your ear close to the water, imagining you can hear what they are saying. You are praying for her to scream your name and ask to be saved but there is only the distant murmur of exploding lights making passionate contact with the surface of the water. You are sure this is the sound of being in love. You sit on the shore and light off the fireworks your grandfather has bought for you. Inside the small paper bag there a number of different kinds. One of them is small and pink and labeled, "Demons in the Spring." You light it and it does not explode and go to light it again, and then, the firework explodes in your hand. You run inside, trying not to cry. Your grandmother wraps your fingers in a warm towel and sits beside you all night. Your mother calls the next day from some other state but you refuse to talk to her. You sit on the dock and watch the girl you thought you loved pack up her belongings. You are stare at her and she waves but you do not wave back. You think of composing her a letter but never do. Summer ends. School begins. You meet new girls.

When you do lose your virginity many years later, you will tell the young lady afterwards that it was your first time. She will say it is OK and kiss the tip of your nose. You will remember this as the first time you cry in front of somebody to whom you are not related. You will be small and weak. You will be holding her hand. You will feel like you are running into something hot and white and pink. ©



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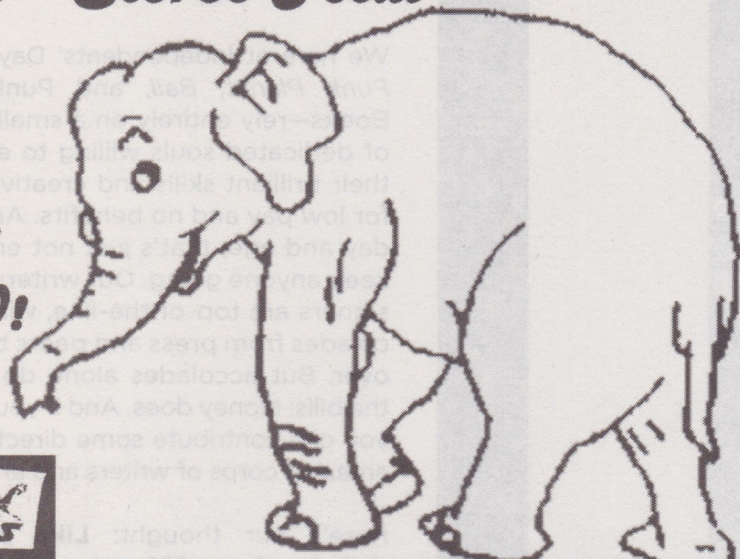
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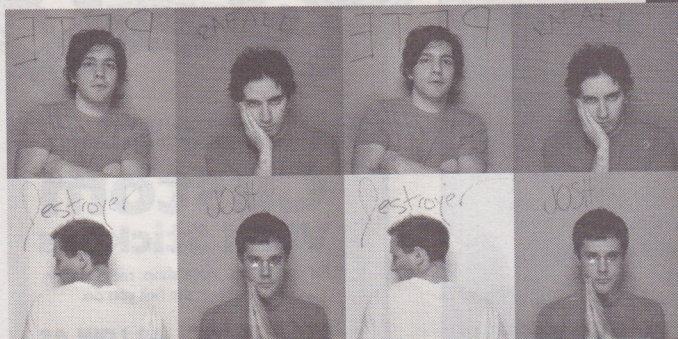
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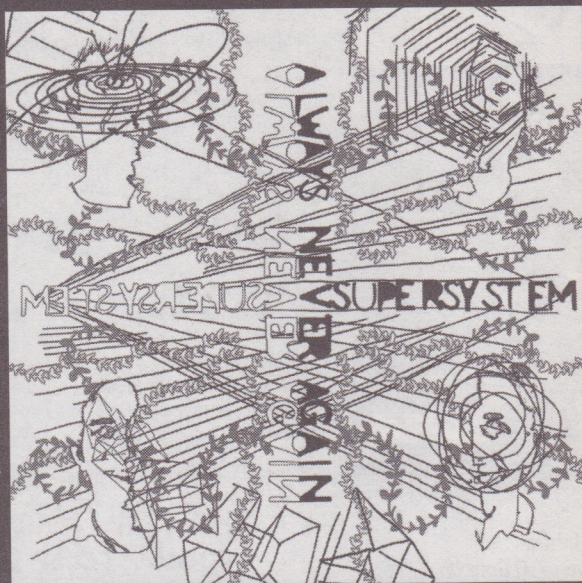
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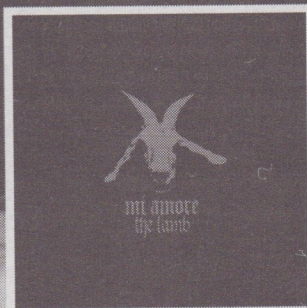


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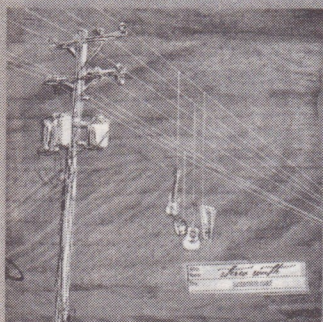
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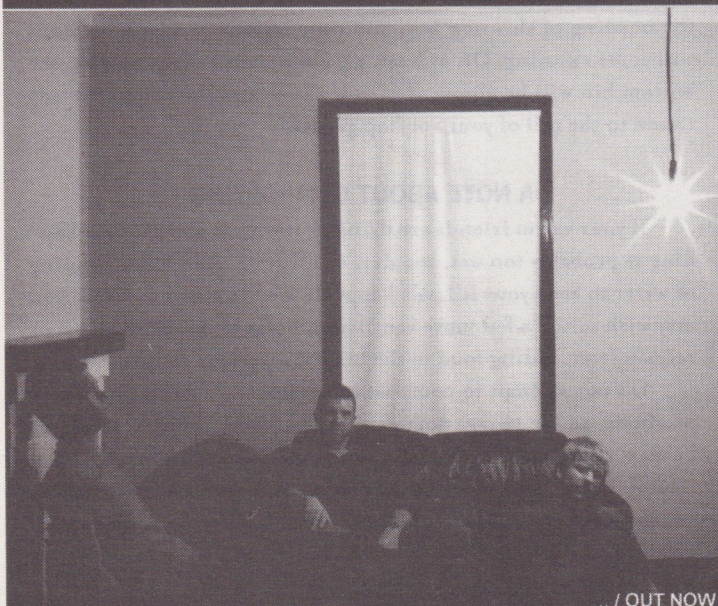
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Vermicize It!

By Anne Elizabeth Moore

In my secret identity as an avid organic gardener, I have often been asked: "How do you compost in your studio apartment in Chicago?"

It is an excellent question, and while most would respond by running off to the Internet to purchase the asker a small worm bin, I will tell you how to make your own worm bin. It is both easy and rewarding—plus you get to use power tools!

LOCATE (steal, purchase, or borrow)

Two eight- to 10-gallon Rubbermaid or Sterilite plastic storage boxes often called "sweater storage bins" with lids.

Drill with 1/4" and 1/16" bits.

Large bowl.

Newspaper.

One lb. redworms. Redworms can be purchased at bait shops, over the Internet, or in specialty organic gardening stores. There are about 500 worms to the pound, but they multiply quickly. Certain suppliers won't ship redworms in the Midwest until after the spring thaw so plan ahead.

Composting materials: eggshells, vegetables, fruits, breads, cereals, coffee grounds, tea bags.

MAKE THE BINS

1. With the 1/16" bit, drill ten ventilation holes on the side of each bin near the lip along the top edge. Make the holes small so fruit flies do not get in there and mess up the composting magic.
2. Drill about 20 evenly spaced holes along the bottom of each bin. These will provide drainage and act as worm doors.
3. Shred the newspaper into one-inch strips and then place into your large bowl. Soak the strips in water for a short while and then squeeze them out, placing the moist strips along the bottom of one of your holey bins. Put the other bin aside for a few weeks.
4. Gently place your 500 new best vermipals on the newspaper bedding. They will be extra-happy if you place some soil or ground eggshells in the bin with them. It makes them feel more at home in their new surroundings.
5. Place the lid on the bin, and locate a well-ventilated area for the bin to sit. Elevate it off the ground with cement blocks (or stilts!) and place the other lid on the ground below to catch drainage.

(This drainage is called "worm tea" and is an excellent liquid fertilizer as well as a delicious beverage. Oh, just kidding about the beverage.)

6. Divide your bin up into six sections, one per week. Feed your tiny red pets slowly at first, adding more food as they multiply. Bury the compost in the newspaper scraps or suffer the consequences! Which will be those meddling fruit flies, coming to annoy your worms while they are trying to work. Unmeddled with, your vermissociates will follow the food scraps around as you bury them in different sections of the bin. You don't even need to make signs!

7. After six weeks, the first bin will be full and there will be no recognizable food scraps. Your worms will have multiplied, but do not be scared! If you have been nice to them, they probably won't unite, take over your identity, and rack up your credit card bills like they did to my cousin. Place new shredded, moistened newspaper in the bottom of the second bin. Place this second bin right into the first bin and cover with the lid. Bury your food scraps in the bedding of this new bin, and your legions of wiggly minions will come running. Or, at least, wiggling. After a few months, the bottom bin will be empty of vermiculture and the compost ready to add to the soil of your rooftop garden!

A NOTE ABOUT COMPOSTING

If your worm friends are dying or trying to escape, your bedding is probably too wet, too dry, or all gone. Add more bedding or water to keep your li'l pals happy. If the bin starts to smell, you may wish to add a few more ventilation holes or leave the lid off or refrain from adding food to the bin for a week or so.

Do not attempt to compost oily leftovers, fats, meats, dairy products, whole twigs, domestic animal feces, human feces, or human remains. These things are not digestible to our little vermifriends, and even if they were, you wouldn't want them getting used to the taste of human flesh and coming after you, would you?

Finally, if mysterious charges suddenly appear on your credit card bill, place a whole watermelon into your vermiculture bin. Wormies love watermelon, and you've clearly got to get back in their good graces somehow. ☺

DIY food

EVERYTHING THAT EATS, LIVES

by stacey gengo

Don't Drink Your Milk

After a wedding I attended in Wisconsin, the reception was a sit-down dinner next to the Packers stadium. Just before dinner was served, glasses of milk were offered to each guest from large trays. Puzzled, I asked another guest about this custom. In turn, the whole table shockingly looked my way—apparently in Wisconsin a glass of milk before dinner is like brushing your teeth before bed.

I haven't had a glass of milk before or with dinner since I was a kid, but I guess you consume what's plentiful in your region of the world, like Scandinavia or Tibet where animal fats are as much a diet staple as milk-drinking is in Wisconsin. If you consider the general consumption of milk, it's usually infants and children. Historically, this was the US milk-drinking market until about the 19th century, when increased urbanization created a mass-market demand for milk. This newly centralized and concentrated need stressed dairies producing the milk, which led to tainted milk, overworked cows and, consequently, the need for safer conditions of production. At this time milk was fresh—straight from the cow, not pasteurized or homogenized.

Early modernization created two major dairy corporations, Nestle and Borden. Their main target market was the new mother. Infant formulas were introduced to replace mother's milk, while pasteurized milk was quick to fill the role of fresh raw milk from local dairies. Soon, the industrial market appeared safer than the raw milk option, as small urban dairies were generally deemed unsanitary.

What did this mean for the dairy farmer? It killed the small farmer and merged milk processors. The government didn't have the time or the money to inspect all of the small dairy farms and wanted just a few "quality" controlled production centers to educate and monitor. New York City was the first to require all milk to be pasteurized in 1912.

Fast forward to the present and not much has changed. For example, two corporations currently control Northeast milk production and distribution. Cows on these and most industrial dairy farms are bred for volume and raised in confinement, as opposed to pasture-raised cows. They are fed an unnatural grain-and-soy based diet, which in itself creates different milk than that of grass-fed cows. A commercial cow is bred to have enlarged pituitary glands that increase her milk production three times. Her milk contains high levels of growth hormones, even without the genetically engineered Bovine Growth Hormone injection. This is in addition to the antibiotics the overworked cow is fed, being more susceptible to disease in an overworked state. These cows are forced to produce milk all year long, while naturally-raised cows would go dry in the winter, producing only enough milk for their calves. This gives them about a one-year life expectancy. After a year, they are shipped off to the butcher. The milk product of these cows, even before pasteurization, is missing some main benefits of a grass-fed cow's milk, essential elements that, among other advantages, enhance the immune system, reduce allergen reactions, and lower cholesterol.

Since the inception of modern dairy technology, there are now two types of milk and milk products—raw or pasteurized. As you might suspect, raw milk is not pasteurized, retaining all milk fats, essential minerals, vitamins, and flora, while pasteurized milk destroys potentially harmful microorganisms and limits fermentation. Because of this, pasteurized milk is the only milk found on market shelves.

Pasteurization basically heats a liquid to a high temperature for a certain amount of time to kill potential pathogens. In theory, this could be a positive operation for the dairy industry, but when applied to milk it actually kills some of the necessary bacteria for proper digestion. Because of pasteurization our bodies occasionally lack the enzymes necessary to properly digest milk, known as lactose intolerance. Allergic reactions to milk are due to the pasteurization process when bacteria cells are literally spilled after rupturing, releasing histamines—which if left intact could prevent allergies.

Advocates of raw milk cite the many nutritional benefits of non-pasteurized milk. The high levels of vitamins and minerals that are lost in the pasteurization process are vital for healthy bodies, significantly minerals important in fighting osteoporosis. The cream contained in raw milk contains a cortisone-like agent, effective in fighting allergies. At one time, raw milk was used to fight diabetes, eczema, and arthritis. Accordingly, raw milk consumers experience lower cases of asthma and allergies with generally higher tolerances against disease. It should be noted however that neither process is immune to food borne pathogens like salmonella or e. coli.

Pasteurized products are further altered to achieve proper taste and color. In commercial production of liquid milk products, both one- and two-percent milk have powdered skim milk added back to the pasteurized liquid. Pale butter and cheese from grain-fed cows have colorings added to make it look as if it came from vitamin-rich, grass-fed cows. These products pale in comparison to the raw milk alternative, but should laws against the sale of raw milk overturn, industrial farming would be challenged once again by the small dairy farmer.

Even though it is illegal to sell raw milk in most states, it is possible to purchase some healthier dairy products from commercial biodynamic farms like Brown Cow and Seven Stars. They use pasteurized milk but add enzymes back to it through the curing process in making yogurt.

Raw cheese is almost a separate issue; it caused international debate when the US attempted to ban its trade through WTO food standards. US cheese has been driven by commercial production since WWII when cheese makers went off to war and inexperienced businesses took over production. Safety and health problems quickly became an issue and by 1949 pasteurization was the law for US cheese, unless aged 60 days under specific conditions. Raw cheese is available in some stores—look for "milk" or "fresh milk" on cheese labels.

Small dairy farms have found some demand for raw milk products and most states allow farm shares, where consumers enter into agreements with the farmer. The most comprehensive list of states and their regulations can be found on the website realmilk.com.

So go on and drink your milk, just be sure of where it came from. ©

DIY Sex EARLY TO BED

by sex lady searah

When you think of sex toys, you don't usually think of great design. Unfortunately, most manufacturers don't think of it either.

Sex toys have been around for ages; dildos have been for around for thousands of years. Back in the day, dildos were often intricately carved works of art made of stone, bone, or even wood (I know, ouch!). They were, in their own way, an art form.

Then came mass production (albeit thousands of years later) and the inevitable shift from dildos as art pieces to functional, ugly, cheaply produced cylinders of jelly rubber or hard plastic. And because sex became such a dirty topic in our modern age, time, money, and talent weren't wasted on making these "marital aids" look good. The sex-toy business was a pretty seedy industry, looking to make big money off of cheaply made products sold to people too embarrassed to complain.

Then came the enlightened 1990s and things began to change. Sex toys started to come out of the closet, big time. Women were opening non-creepy sex shops; vibrators started getting airtime on TV, and were talked about in respected women's magazines; and people began to take notice of their crappy (lack of) design. And then, finally, people starting making sex toys that not only got your rocks off, but that looked good doing it.

I want to share with you some of the best designs (in my humble opinion) that I have seen in the past three-and-a-half years of near-constant sex toy research.

Natural Contours Vibrators

For a long time, most vibes have been manufactured by big companies that, although they claim otherwise, I swear have no women working for them. Sharp edges, ridiculous shapes, and horrible controls are only a few of the horrors that plague the common vibrator. Then along came Candida Royalle, former porn star turned women-oriented porn maker. She started a company called Natural Contours that produces some of the best-looking vibes on the market. Made of muted-toned plastic, these curvy, three-speed vibes not only take the shape of a woman's body into account, but they look gorgeous as well. None of them look anything like a cock, which, with all due respect to the boys, really aren't the pretties things ever. The packaging as well is an innovation. Most vibes are packaged in tacky plastic clamshells with a (usually horrible) photo of a half-naked porn star wannabe holding the product, ensuring you'll want to hide the box way in the bottom of the garbage when you get home. But Natural

Contours are packed in discreet, elegantly designed boxes with nothing more than a photograph of the item contained inside.

Lelo

This brand-new Swedish company is making the coolest new vibe around. What looks like a smooth red pebble is actually a high-quality, rechargeable, waterproof vibe that fits a woman's girlparts as beautifully as it fits in her hand. The controls are blissfully easy to use and even lock for safe travel (a never-before-seen trait). This vibe comes packaged in a sleek, black presentation box and includes a silky carrying pouch. I was smitten the minute I saw it, despite its hefty price tag (almost twice as expensive as our next most expensive vibe) and hooked the minute I tried it. Good design is so worth the price.

Vixen Creations

My all-time favorite dildo manufactures, these chicks brought art back to dildo-making 13 years ago. Made of high-quality, medical-grade silicone, Vixen dildos come in an impressive array of sexy and unexpected shapes and sizes. For sheer beauty, the gentle, sensuous S-curve of the Stimulator is my top pick. Vixen also created the first double dildo that really took the way women fuck into consideration in its design. Unlike the double dildos you see in porn, this checkmark-shaped wonder allows a woman to insert one end into her vagina while the other end protrudes out, allowing her to fuck her partner and still be close to him or her. It is kinda hard to explain, but believe me when I tell you, this is probably the best fucking designed dildo out there. Vixen also gets much love from me and many of their fans for using rich, bright colors (not your standard "flesh" colors) and even making dildos in sparkly, glitter-infused clear silicone. For years, they packaged these high-end babies in plastic bags (not the sexiest thing ever), but have just started shipping them in reusable, clear plastic tubes that double as storage devices. And I didn't know I could love them more!!

Fun Factory

A newer, European player in the scene, these guys have come up with silicone dildos and vibrators that are fun and sometimes even funny. Their packaging looks like it came right off the shelf at Toys R Us, complete with silly cartoons of animals. Their toys are almost all animal-shaped, which does put off some people, but how can you help but smile back when your vibe is smiling at you? The Paul & Pauline dual-action vibe is a big winner, with a

wormish shape, bright, matte colors and two smiling little characters. They also recently came out with silicone anal beads (which is enough to make me squeal in delight) that have a delightful happy face as the handle. They are so cute I want to give them to babies as teething toys, but I have been told I would get in trouble. From a user-friendly standpoint, the controls they designed for their waterproof vibes are a standout. A ton of vibes on the market have controls that are so stupid and hard to use, people break them just trying to turn them on. These geniuses designed a control that you can easily adjust with a small twist of your thumb, leaving the rest of your fingers free to do other things.

Glass Dildos

Five years ago there were only a handful of people making what was to become the hottest thing in sex toys, glass dildos. Now there are tons of companies producing all sorts of glass dildos, vibrators, and butt plugs. Many of them are nice enough, but a couple people are making really beautiful toy. We sell a lot of glass toys from a company called Phallix. They are a big player in this business and make toys out of medical-grade Pyrex glass. These toys are works of art, some so lovely that you might be tempted to keep them on your mantel. While I will admit, from someone-with-a-cunt's standpoint, that some of their designs seem downright painful, for the most part these naughty glass sculptures are functional toys that create a really unique sensation. Glass is almost frictionless, unlike most sex toys, and the temperature can be easily manipulated with a few seconds under hot or cold water. They are not great for banging away at someone's cervix with (they are very, very hard) but they are great for a slow, tender fuck. Phallix gets high points from us for their expert use of color and design. They have twisty filigreed designs (a sort of double-helix looking interior) and rich rub-colored glass, as well as dark blue cobalt toys that you really don't want to put down. Glass dildos are also made by a bunch of really small companies and artisans who come from glass pipe-making backgrounds; whatever you may think of stoners, you have to admit that a lot of those pipes are gorgeous, even if you are sober.

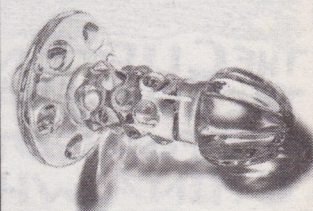
Owning a unique piece of art whose main function is to give you pleasure is quite a wonderful thing. Don't get me wrong: I love paintings, prints and such, but I have never had an orgasm from one. ©

Visit my shop: Early to Bed 5232 N. Sheridan Chicago, IL 60640.

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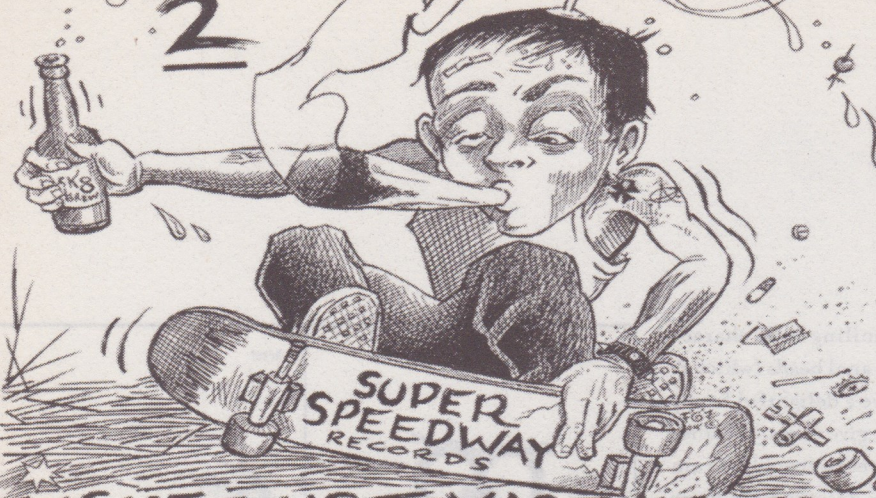


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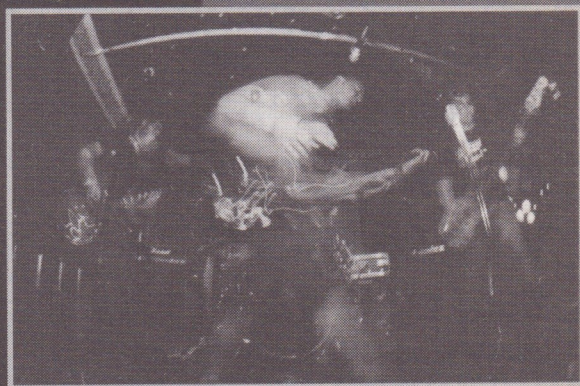
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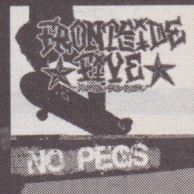
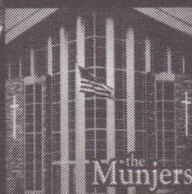


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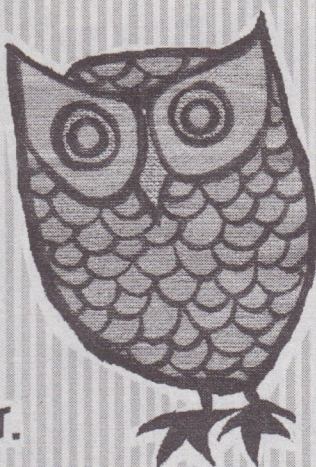
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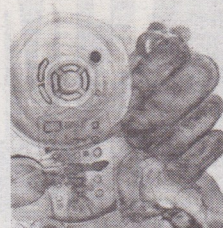
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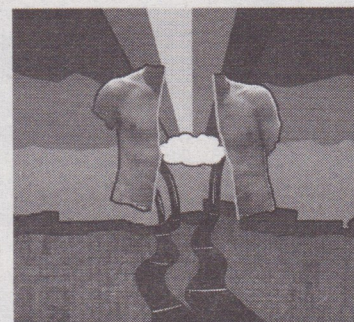
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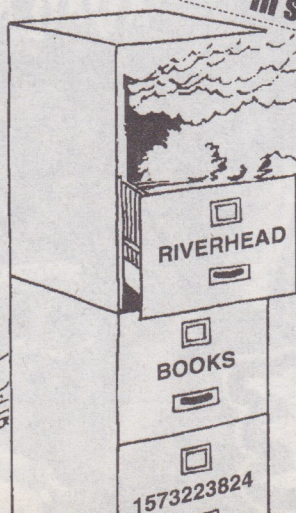
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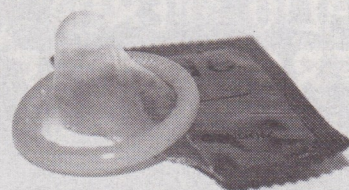
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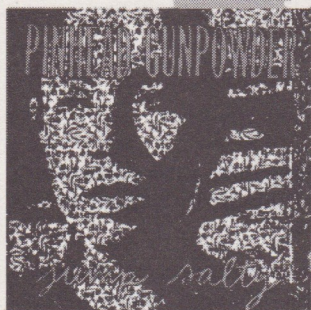


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music

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Amy Adoyzie (AA), Dan Agacki (DA), Eric Action (EA), Abbie Amadio (AJA), Bill Angelbeck (BA), Jay Castaldi (JC), Vincent Chung (VC), Carla Costa (CC), Art Ettinger (AE), Melissa Geils (MG), Julie Gerstein (JG), Tara Goe (TG), Jason Gooder (JG), Emily Hausman (EH), Dave Hofer (DH), Don Irwin (DI), Ari Joffe (AJ), Scott Jones (SJ), Tim Kuehl (TK), Dan Laidman (DAL), Ryan Leach (RL), Justin Marciniak (JM), Todd Martens (TM), Krystle Miller (KM), Sean Moeller (SM), (Mr.) Dana Morse (DM), Brian Moss (BM), Bart Niedzialkowski (BN), Missy Paul (MP), Rex Reason (RR), Neal Shah (NS), Tony Stasiek (TS) Lisa Weingarth (LW) EDITED BY KYLE RYAN (KR)

Abandoned Hearts Club, *The – The Initial Confessions Of . . .*, CDEP

This really threw me for a loop. By the art, I assumed it would be indie rock. Boy was I wrong. This is straight-up, technical moshy metal. For once I don't mean that in a bad way. This is one of the best things I've heard from that genre—and it looks amazing. (DA)

Init, PO Box 871, Sioux Falls, SD 57101 www.initrecords.com

Adicts, *The – Made In England*, CD

Thirty years after their formation, The Adicts release this compilation of selected tracks from their discography and give further proof of what we already know: The Adicts are one of the strongest British street-punk bands ever. Clad in his finest *Clockwork Orange* regalia, vocalist Monkey proved that you don't have to really know how to sing for it to be powerful. The jagged guitar lines of Pete Davidson (one of punk's most underrated guitarists) proved that simplicity could have style, and his own would be the baseline for post-punk's sound. Hammering out anthems for the Kids ("Just Like Me," "Too Young") has always been and still is at the heart of The Adicts, which makes songs like "Easy Way Out" inspire frenzied dancing to this day. (CC)

SOS, PO Box 3017, Corona, CA 92878, www.sosrecords.com

Adicts, *The – Rise And Shine*, CD

The album starts off with a beautiful, unknown classical song with piano, strings and other unamplified instruments. Then it breaks into a British sounding pop-punk song. I don't get it. This band seems influenced by British culture, from the picture of a classic red telephone booth in the booklet to pics of the band playing in *Clockwork Orange* outfits. There are also some Pogues-ish songs. To me, it's not as good as the best '70s British punk, but if you're a die-hard fan of the genre, you might like this. (JJG)

SOS, PO Box 3017 Corona, CA 92878-3017, www.sosrecords.us

Alarmist – *Evil Works Get Rich Or Try Dying Evil Works*, CD

It's official: No wave has become a dead scene. *Evil Works* is chock-full of the same spazzoid freak-outs-cum-art-school-pretension that seems to invigorate everybody on the West Coast, but it bores my New York sensibilities. Say what you will about trendy Manhattan "The" bands, at least you can dance to them. (MS)

Frenetic, PO Box 640434 San Francisco, CA 94164, www.freneticrecords.com

Aluminum Knot Eye – *Trunk Lunker*, CD

This noise band reminds one of the many others who did the discordant thing when it was arty, cool, etc. AKE do it well, although it has been done better. If you dig the Midwest noise scene of years past, then you will definitely love it. (EA)

Self-released, PO Box 12714, Green Bay, WI 54307-2714, www.aluminumknoteye.com

American Static – *Soundtrack Of The Struggle*, CD

Street-punk bands tend always have a Clash influence. I hear a bit of the Clash in American Static, but it's subtle; this reminds me more of Oxy-

ron. At first glance, this album looked pretty cliché, but I'm glad I kept an open mind, because it is actually worth a listen. (DA)

Street Anthem, 1530 Locust St. PO Box 218, Philadelphia, PA 19102, www.streetanthemrecords.com

Ammi – *Laodicea*, CDEP

Ammi's overtones of ambient noise and whiney vocals drowns out its strength: undertones of delicately constructed melodies. The result is that *Laodicea* comes off as a bland attempt at making the cut for The OC's next soundtrack. (CC)

Common Cloud, 2000 W. Addison #2, Chicago, IL 60618, www.commoncloud.com

Amoeba Men, *The – Enter*, 7"

Highly distorted vocals set against zany electronic effects with disharmony being the only obvious goal. It's pretty out there, but if you're into shit that weirds others out, this should be right up your alley. (BN)

CNP, PO Box 14555, Richmond, VA 23221

Analena – *Carbon Based*, CD

Analena stick out in the screamo world because they have a female vocalist, and they're from Croatia. They blend different styles of music, mostly indie rock and hardcore. This is a good record that has powerful sound. (EH)

Moonlee, Pot Na Breg 8, 5250 Solkan, Slovenia, www.moonleerecords.com

Anchorhead – *Disaster*, CD

Country rock, big on hooks and harmonies—not excessively gritty, they have a really casual, beer-sipping vibe. Lots of pedal steel, acoustic guitar strumming, and twangy leads. Solid tunes, good times. Son Volt and Uncle Tupelo fans: check this one out. (AJ)

SMA / self-released, PO Box 583183, Minneapolis, MN 55458, www.anchorhead.net

And Everybell And Whistle – *Did You See What They Chased Him With?*, 7"

I was ready to take it easy on these guys because, fuck, bands invest a lot of themselves in these releases. It's all well and good for Mr./Ms. Self-Styled Myoo Zick Jer Nalst to cavalierly piss all over their hard and heartfelt work. But then I had to type the titles these so-late-for-the-trend-they're-early: arpeggio guitars, soft/quiet introspective yet arty moments, well-designed sleeves with shit mashed into the vinyl, songs expressing how tough it is to grow up as a teenager in the most privileged country in the world—and, whew, I just lost my shit. (RR)

Say-And-Stay-Said, c/o Daniel Black, 1911 Elliot Ave. S., #1, Minneapolis, MN 55404, www.say-and-stay-said.com

ANTISEEN – *Badwill Ambassadors*, CD

The prolific ANTISEEN is always releasing or rereleasing records of some sort, but this is their first studio full-length since 2001. One of the more easily recognizable forces in punk now that they've been around for 20-plus years, ANTISEEN is known for mixing a simplistic, Ramones-influenced sound with hints of country and early '80s hardcore. They stray a little from their barebones punk roots on this album, bringing in more diverse rock influences, while not experimenting too much as to annoy their fans. There

are a few songs that are sure to become staples of their notorious live set for years to come, such as "FTK," the album's catchiest track, a fantastic song about the ills of today's punk scene. The majority of the songs are high-speed, but the band also takes chances with interesting slower tracks such as "Pledge Allegiance To The Bomb." It seems as though a lot of people are afraid to check out ANTISEEN for one reason or another, so they remain one of the most underappreciated and misunderstood bands in the history of punk subculture. For the vinyl collector, it's also available as an LP from the diverse Italian label Scarey Records. (AE)

TKO, 8941 Atlanta Ave #505, Huntington Beach, CA 92646, www.tkorecords.com

Arabella – *Duvet*, 7"

Arabella plays hardcore with a few singing parts, with totally predictable, speedier parts accompanied by drawn out, dramatic build-ups. You've heard this kind of hardcore many times. (EH)

Spacement, 5210 Idiebury Way, Reno, NV 89523, www.spacementreno.com

Arameus – *Is Your Revolution Merely For Display?*, CD

Whoa! Metalcore with little melodic singing parts thrown in the middle is back. This would have been huge had it come out in the US around the same time as the first Poison The Well record. There are lots of cool stop/start tech-type parts, two vocalists (one screecher, one screamer), lots of chugga-chugga and pretty melodic parts with nice singing and quietly picked reverbed guitar. I dig this very much. I know this is nothing new, and maybe I'm just feeling nostalgic, but I always liked this sound, and I enjoy hearing bands from the UK. If you're one of the few out there still willing to admit you enjoy this sound (or at least used to), I think you might like these guys, as they bring some interesting guitar work to the table and can actually play this style well. A keeper. (KM)

Engineer USA, 210 William St., Boonton, NJ 07005, www.engineerrecords.com

Asthma Attaq / Dirty South Apocalypse – *split*, 12"

Asthma Attaq's sound is sort of an odd concoction of melodic, clean riffs, clumsily transitioned heavy riffs and high-pitched screams. A few spaced-out effects mix with an obvious Gainesville influence without ever quite adding up. Dirty South Apocalypse seem bent on inducing ennui through a smattering of sludge, evilness and growls. (SJM)

Forever Escaping Boredom, 416 45th St., Palmetto, FL 34221, tufuslayer@hotmail.com

Ateriavia – *Regarding the Midwest: Sleeping*, CDEP

Despite precocious song titles and crappy cover art, this is a solid album. What Ateriavia lack in lyrical brilliance, they make up for with booty-shaking dissonant guitars, layered, hollered vocals and unrelenting drums. The instrumental intro/outros are especially strong, making me hope they will experiment with more ambient tracks on future albums. (TG)

Lujo, 3209 Jennie Drive, Morgan City, LA 70380, www.lujorecords.com

Atkins Lane – *The Guafdr EPK*, CDEP/DVD

The new emo-pop craze, with piles of similar-sounding bands putting out CDs, makes it difficult for bands to stand out. But Virginia's energetic

Atkins Lane manage to do it with their risky juxtapositions of aggressive and decidedly non-macho styles. This high-energy release comes with a well-produced DVD of videos. (AE)
Self-released, 3826 Hickory Fork Rd., Gloucester, VA 23061, www.atkinslane.com

Avid Cadaver – Sire, You're On Fire!, CD

Avid Cadaver play emo metal and unfortunately write very boring songs. I wanted to like this, but I just couldn't bring myself to do it. (SJ)
Gray Music Company, 2626 N. Rockwell 2FF, Chicago, IL 60647, www.geocities.com/gray-musiccompany

Awoken – Take Aim, CDEP

It doesn't get better than old school NYHC riffs, devilishly dark metal songwriting, youth-crew chants and glass-fed vocals spewing songs about betrayal. While crossover bands of this ilk suffer from overly technical flourishes, fancy footwork and that goddamned melody, UK's Awoken strips down and lets brutality shine. (VC)
Let It Burn, Ergleisereistr. 51, 80335 Munich, Germany, www.letitburnrecords.com

Audible – Sky Signal, CD

Boring, mostly midtempo indie pop. The slower parts remind me of a bad Elliott Smith imitation—especially with the doubled vocal tracks. It's not horrible; I'm sure lots of people will really like this, but I am not one of those people. (DA)
Polyvinyl, Po Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826-7140, www.polyvinylrecords.com

Ayin – Nothing Islands, CD

This record rules: a strange combination of that Shellac bass-heavy rock sound, hardcore, circus synthesizers and spastic rock 'n' roll. I know it sounds terrible, but it's not. Somehow, Ayin have a way of combining all of these wacky elements that is pure awesomeness. Check it out for yourself! (MG)
Thrown Brick, POB 4831, Louisville, KY 40204, <http://www.thrownbrick.tripod.com>

Baby Blak – Just Begun: King Honey & Team Shadetek Mixes, 12"

King Honey earns Side A with a Tweeter-worthy apocalyptic orchestra sample marching in "Early Mix." It complements Baby Blak's steady rapping. With delayed piano, the trip-hop "Late Mix" founders. Team Shadetek's adventuresome "SIK SHT scritchmix" uses clicking, baseball-cards-in-spokes samples, a sustained horn and injections of noise. Two good, inessential sides. (JM)
Sound Ink, 95 Wyckoff St. #3A, Brooklyn, NY 11201, www.sound-ink.com

Baby Boy H – The Later, CD

Baby Boy H play well-polished rock tunes with female vocals. Their songs are fairly straightforward and occasionally layered with keyboards, with a good feel for song composition—definitely heavy on the radio-rock sound. Not my thing, but there's no denying that they know what they're doing for this particular sound. (SJM)
Radar, PO Box 1205, Allston, MA 02134, www.radarrecordings.com

Back When – Celebration Of Alceste, CD

Spastic hardcore with a bunch of changes and some slow parts. I like the dual vocals, but the two three-minute songs should have been replaced with a few of their much better, shorter songs. (DH)
Imagine It, 817 N. 50th Ave., Omaha, NE 68132, www.imagineitrecords.com

Back When – Swords Against The Father, 7"

Even though Back When kindly includes the lyrics to the four tracks on this 7", understanding every word is difficult. Blame the screaming and barked vocals. Picking up the vocals' slack, the music evokes the gothic darkness of horror and fantasy stories. If you dig heavy hardcore, try Back When. (JM)
Init, PO Box 871, Sioux Falls, SD 57101-0871, www.initrecords.com

Bad Moon Music – Empire, CDEP

Pairing aggressive guitars with watered-down melodies, Bad Moon Music's drudgy rock ends up sounding very mismatched. Heavier type rock and "poppier" melodies do not go well together, resulting in either an unhappy disjunction or monotony. The combination reconciles its differences on the later half of the EP, but not enough for a recommendation. (AJA)
Hawthorne Street, PO Box 805353, Chicago, IL 60680, www.hawthornestreetrecords.com

Bafabegiya – Those Who Die Dancing, 7"

Though the skull-and-casket-adorned packaging screams metal, these boys are hardcore to the bone. It's loud, it's fast, and it's crudely recorded—everything hardcore should be. I'm sure Bafabegiya is able to whip a basement full of Reno kids into a frenzy. (LW)
Spacemint, 5210 Idlebury Way, Reno, NV 89523, www.spacemintreno.com

Bakelite – S/T, CD

Bakelite are definitely not the first duo of dudes to take lo-fi beats and shred them with terminator pedal guitar riffs, and they're definitely not the most interesting either. Throwing in the standard high-pitch, yowl-

ing vocals, Bakelite comes up short of being as innovative as plastic the band's named after. (CC)

Sound Document, #540-360 Robson St., Vancouver, BC V6B 2B2 Canada, www.sound-document.com

Bang Sugar Bang – Thwak Thwak Go Crazy, CD

The opening track of Thwak Thwak Go Crazy is so damn in your face it was hard to ignore this disc. I rarely notice the engineers of records, but this one was knob-twisted by Geza X and Paul Roessler, two great rock heroes. Great power, pop and sound make this a fine release, but there is a catch: consistency. Opening track "Punk Beat" is a full-on explosion, while most of the remaining tracks lean toward midtempo pop. I wasn't expecting the change in sound; though it grabs your attention, it is kind a strange way to start a record. I am sure that Bang Sugar Bang are fans of Cheap Trick, and fans of Cheap Trick will be fans of Bang Sugar Bang too. There are male and female vocals, but they're best when they join together on tracks like "Tony," a song reminiscent of X, which shows Geza X's influence. (EA)
War Room, PO Box 93-1813 Los Angeles, CA 90093-9998, www.warroomrecords.com

Barlow, Lou – EMOH, CD

Having catalogued countless songs with Dinosaur Jr, The Folk Implosion, and Sebadoh, Lou Barlow's recorded work is mostly considered quintessential. EMOH marks his first official solo release, and while a move in this direction is often marked by mediocrity, Barlow (joined once again by varying friends and old bandmates) proves that some things just get better over time. His subtle pop songwriting has reached a point of brilliant mastery, and the record in question has left me thoroughly impressed in the wake of its neo-folk glory. EMOH isn't necessarily an album that invents a new sound, but it undoubtedly raises the bar to a towering new height. Melodically unflawed and lyrically sharp, Barlow's newest collection of sweet and sad songs will leave you feeling blanketed in a sanctuary of warmth. (BM)
Merge, PO Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, www.mergerecords.com

Baseball Furies, The – Let It Be, CD

In the years since their transplant, Buffalo's boyish gang have blossomed into the Chicago mob kings they are now. Their debut, *Greater Than Ever*, sounded like TNT through your speakers, but this follow-up is an orchestrated carpet-bombing of American might—and only the Americans. While trading in the lo-fi sonic fury of their debut, *The Base-*

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ball Furies nod toward more subtle qualities like melody/harmony and dynamics. No, they haven't gotten tame (hey, the full-length still clocks in at well under 30 minutes), but the years between the albums definitely show songwriting maturity. They already pulled off the feat of a shrapnel-spewing 90-mph riff pummel, but Let It Be proves they can do so with seasoned discipline—only so they can take the time to relish in their sadism. (VC)

Big Neck, PO Box 8144, Reston, VA 20195, www.bigneckrecords.com

Bassholes – Broke Chamber Music, CD

Bring on the blooze murk. Most of this collection of early singles and unreleased stuff from 1992-1994 could only be more lo-fi if it were recorded under a few feet of mud, and that works. Bluesy music—punk influenced like this or not—doesn't sound right with multi-multi-track recording. Shit's gotta ooze. Just like this. (RR)

Secret Keeper, www.secretkeeperrecords.com

Bassholes – S/T, CD

This trend-preceding blues-rock duo tries anything from straightforward rock to moody, reverb-heavy tunes. Bassholes sounds comfortable, original and best when unplugging for rootsy numbers or bringing in a harmonica player and honoring Howlin' Wolf. Although Bassholes shuns inauthentic blues, the band should sprout more roots through backwoods and bluegrass. (JM)

Dead Canary, PO Box 10276, Columbus, OH 43201, www.deadcanaryrecords.com

Bastille – Shiver Of Theology / Bad Pilot, 7"

A very nice, sincere, hand-numbered 7" from this Massachusetts hardcore band. Musically, this 7" works when the band focuses on instrumentals (as demonstrated by the intro to "Shiver Of Theology"); other than that, it is pretty uninteresting hardcore. (RL)

Gatehouse Anchor, PO Box 7373, Lowell, MA 01852, www.gatehouseanchor.com

Bellrays, The – The Red, White & Black, CD

I've always enjoyed The Bellrays' live show, but felt their albums never measured up. With *The Red, White & Black* they finally catch lightning in a bottle, with a lively recording of a strong set of soulful proto-punk songs. The band finally seems able to match the intensity of singer Lisa Kekaula. (JC)

Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.alternativetentacles.com

Best Friends Forever / And Everybell And Whistle – split, 7"

Best Friends Forever have two songs of simple, anti-folk rock. Think Moldy Peaches, but less silly. The flipside is filled with shouting vocals over straightforward indie rock by Everybell And Whistle. All in all, it's pretty decent. (MP)

Say-And-Stay-Said, c/o Daniel Black, 1911 Elliot Ave. S., #1, Minneapolis, MN 55404, www.say-and-stay-said.com

♫ Bird, Andrew – The Mysterious Production Of Eggs, CD

Andrew Bird is one of the best singer-songwriters out there, and this album proves it. He brings in beautiful and fluttering instrumentation over his already fantastic folk stylings. This album is damn near perfect, and anyone within this genre could learn a thing or two from Bird. (MP)

Righteous Babe, PO Box 95, Elliott Station, Buffalo, NY 14205, www.righteousbabe.com

Black Eyes & Neckties – Stiletto, CD

Imagine the first Murder City Devils record with second-rate Misfits-style horror lyrics. Actually that could be pretty cool, but in this case the songs

go on way too long, and the lyrics are about as spooky as "The Monster Mash." Of course, "The Monster Mash" was intentionally funny. (JC)

New Regard Media, PO Box 5706, Bellingham, WA 98227, www.newregardmedia.com

Black Sea, The – Set And Setting, CD

This disc's line-up features horns as well as synths accompanied by your standard guitar, drums, etc. There's some ambient stuff, a really nice pop song ("Die Like An Astronaut") and tracks that some might call trip-hop. Not really fitting into on category, it's at least fairly consistent. (DH)

Kinda Like Music / self-released, 420 Jericho Turnpike, Ste 213, Jericho, NY 11753, www.theblackseamusic.com

Bleeding Hickeys – Lovers & Haters, Unite!, CD

The Bleeding Hickeys are back with another barrage of punk wave and garage madness. Hot damn! Fast, short, loud and abrasive, this could be the best thing going in Minnesota. The stop-and-go melodies and the strong female vocals go a long way in making this an instant classic. (BN)

Jilted / self-released, 3644 Park Ave S., Minneapolis, MN 55407, www.bleedinghickey.com

Bleeding Kansas – 1859, CDEP

Technical and heavy hardcore with great production. Thick and pulverizing stuff with great yelled vocals and crushing guitar parts. Seven songs, no filler and no letting up. If you're into Botch, Converge or Hydrahead bands, check these guys out. (NS)

Abacus, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd., Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.abacusrecordings.com

Blitzkrieg / Paradox UK – The Gathering Storm, CD

The band names give the music away. If you guessed poorly recorded, old-school punk rock, give yourself a pat on the back. These two bands have actually been around since the early '80s though, so I have to give them the OG credit at least. Other than that this is unmemorable. (KM)

Street Anthem, PMB #218, 1530 Locust St., Philadelphia, PA 19102, www.streetanthemrecords.com

Bloody Crackdown – The End Of The Beginning, CD

This pissed-off death metal was hard for me to take. I admit I'm not a metal head, but I can appreciate some if it's done well. The music on this is one-dimensional, and the lyrics are inane. (JJG)

Valiant Death, www.valiantdeath.com

Blow Goes, The – Seven Cuts, CD

Well, everybody has to start writing music somewhere. The title *Seven Cuts* serves as a chagrined double entendre of both the cover art and the seven bad punk rock songs. Track one features a bizarre amount of shrieking. (SJM)

River's Edge / self-released, 1324 S. 9th St., Philadelphia, PA 19147, www.theblowgoes.com

Bob Burns And The Breakups – C-Store, Baby!, 7"

These Milwaukee boys are fast, so thankfully, their peppy but ultimately uninteresting Fat Wreck Chords-sounding songs about convenience stores and drive-ins don't eat up too much time. (TS)

Dingus, 2407 N. Pierce St., Milwaukee, WI 53212

Books, The – Lost And Safe, CD

This makes me think bands like Joan Of Arc, Mogwai or Sigur Ros, but if they were totally lo-fi and uninteresting. There are lots of weird noises, sounds and effects, but they're not really put together in a way that brings the "songs" together. (KM)

Tomlab, c/o Tom Steinle, Bismarckstr. 70, 50672 Köln, Germany, www.tomlab.de

Bottlejob – You And Whose Army, CD

It's been a long time since I heard an authentic British oi band rip shit up like these four blokes from London. There's some great bass and guitar

work, which shows in the vivacious melodies. "Bent Copper" and "Bullets For The Rich" are alone worth seeking this record out. (BN)

Rebellion, www.rebellionrecords.nl

Brahman – A Forlorn Hope, CD

The first US release, but a breakthrough record for Japanese superstars Brahman. *A Forlorn Hope* has already sold over 500,000 in their homeland. All that means is that the Japanese desperately want someone to play that sweet-swinging Hoobastank nü-metal in their own language. (SM)

Revelation, PO Box 5232, Huntington Beach, CA 92615-5232, www.revelationrecords.com

Branches – S/T, CD

Playful without being annoying, Branches' geeky harmonies and Malkmus-esque vocal deliveries give way to some good, off-balance pop. I also liked the dissimilar male harmonies and xylophone combination on "Tame" and the dance number, "Dusty Grits," with its immediately likeable and fun melody. (AJA)

Contraphonic, PO Box 2203, Chicago, IL 60690, www.contraphonic.com

Braves, The – Love And Mercy, CD

This earnest pop would not be out of place on the Casey Kasem countdown or the soundtrack of a prime-time TV drama. It's polished and safe-sounding, but not quite as irritating as that would suggest; they stop short of being glossy and sound fairly authentic. (DAL)

Johann's Face, PO Box 479164, Chicago, IL 60647, www.johannsfac.com

Breather Resist / Suicide Note – split, 2xCD

This double CD split has four songs of Suicide Note's trashy rock 'n' roll hardcore and three chaotic hardcore gems from Breather Resist. The cool packaging almost seems like a waste for a total of seven songs. I'm not really feeling Suicide Note, but Breather Resist makes this worth it. (DH)

Hawthorne Street, PO Box 805533, Chicago, IL 60680, www.hawthornestreetrecords.com

Brian Jones – Seriously, CD

Some pretty creative, hypnotic, psychedelic, driving riffs are the highlights of this slow to midtempo record that navigates the fine line between head-bobbing and boring. Often the vocals are the weakest part, as they either go for wild screams or paint-by-numbers pseudo-emotion. (DAL)

Self-released, PO Box 8711, Cedar Rapids, IA 52408-8711, www.brianjonesrock.com

Bricklayer – Beanish, CDEP

Refreshing and original punk rock that lies somewhere between pop punk and hardcore. This band will definitely have appeal among Avail and Hot Water Music fans. Also, contains some of the gruffest vocals that you'll ever hear. (MG)

Ambivalent, 5511 Louisiana Ave., St. Louis, MO 63111, www.ambivalent-records.com

♫ Bright Eyes – I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning, CD

Without question, this new album proves that Conor Oberst is ridiculously talented. On this release, Oberst has found a new maturity, musically and lyrically. Gone are the emotionally overwrought lyrics of a lost teenager and the on-record musical mistakes. These qualities, which fans love and critics loathe, have been replaced with politically charged, post-adolescent realizations accompanied by spot-on strumming that is more country-tinged than ever. With help from Emmylou Harris, Jim James and the usual Saddle Creek comrades, Oberst has created a folk masterpiece. Songs like "At The Bottom Of Everything," "Poison Oak" and "Land Locked Blues" show what a gift for songwriting Oberst possesses. What's scary is that Oberst is only 24, and he just keeps getting

Reviewer Spotlight: Eric Action (EA)

XTC, Black Sea. Every local scene has a band they attach themselves to. When I was in high school, there was a sharp distinction in the punks (mohawks), skins (shaved heads), skater kids (long bangs) and goths (dyed black). But XTC was the one band they all liked, a band that you wouldn't expect. I refer to them as the best overlooked band of the '80s. Released in 1980, XTC's *Black Sea* is in my top 10 records of all time. The brilliant "Respectable Street" starts off this original pop slice. Other top tracks include, "Generals And Majors," still relevant today, "Towers of London" and "Sgt. Rock." I look back and laugh at how all those groups of kids in the '80s could dig XTC, a peculiar but oh-so-sweet choice. Quirkiness and stage fright left fans with few live shows to witness. XTC is probably best known for their track "Dear God," which is a great song off a rather average record. "Dear God" is not a track that follows their usual sound, but an acoustic treatment of pop they would later visit in the reunited XTC of the last decade. If it is the only song of theirs you know, then I highly encourage all of you to pick up this LP, though they have a large catalog that you can fully investigate later.

Last five records on my turntable: Buff Medways, *Lie Detector 7"*; A-Lines, *You Can Touch* LP and *One Day* single; The Kitchen, *Foreign Objects*; Buzzcocks, *Singles* boxset.

better. Until the next one comes along, this will be his landmark record, and despite it being early in the year, this album will prove to be one of 2005's best. (MP)

Saddle Creek, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE 68108-0554, www.saddle-creek.com

🔊 Bright Eyes – Digital Ash In A Digital Urn, CD

With the release of *Digital Ash In A Digital Urn*, it seems that Mr. Oberst wants to leave no musical rock unturned. This is his "electronic" album, and like most first-time "electronic" albums (i.e. Smashing Pumpkins' *Adore*) it's hard to swallow, but Conor Oberst is good at what he does. It also helps that he has equally talented assistance from Nick Zinner, Jason Boesel and the man with the Midas touch, Mike Mogis. After a few listens, these songs start growing on you, especially "Gold Mine Guttin'", "Take It Easy" and "Theme From Piñata." Granted, the bleeps and bloops don't work as well as Oberst's regular guitar strumming, but it's not as much of a disaster as one would imagine. Only the lead track, "Time Code" fails, and it does so spectacularly, sounding like a horrible Nine Inch Nails outtake. On the whole, these songs are catchy and worth a listen, if only to hear Oberst trying on a style. (MP)

Saddle Creek, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE 68108-0554, www.saddle-creek.com

Bristle – 30 Blasts From The Past, CD

Bristle does the straight-up punk rock with a Northwestern feel to perfection. *Blasts From The Past* is essentially a discography of compilation tracks, singles, out of prints and a few unreleased songs. The sound quality is all over the place and occasionally flat, so the power of the band isn't quite captured. (EA)

Rodent Popsicle, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

🔊 Brother JT – Off Blue, CD

John Terlesky ("Brother JT") has been a big man in the neo-psychedelia movement for almost 20 years, composing his own brand of acid-laced rock, both as a member of Original Sins and Vibrolux and as a solo artist. *Off Blue*, JT's eighth solo album, is his most stripped-down and personal set of songs yet. Recorded in his living-room studio and rendered mostly on acoustic guitar, this collection of songs comes off as a quiet, confessional—reflections on life mistakes and relationships gone bad, conveyed on a warm bed of hazy psychedelia. This is a tragically beautiful album, perhaps the quiet magnum opus of Brother JT's career. (LW)

Birdman, 441 Victory Blvd, Suite C, San Francisco, CA 94080, www.thebirdmangroup.com

🔊 Brutally Frank – Thirt3en, CD

Watch out Lux and Poison Ivy! This super-cool, mixed gender, punked out rockabilly three-piece is comin' for your psychobilly title! I'm really picky about my rockabilly. If it's too gimmicky and generic, I lose interest really quickly. But when it's done right, as it is by Brutally Frank, modern rockabilly (or psychobilly, or whatever) is able to capture the essence of early Sun Records rock 'n' roll, shoot it full of hardcore and thrash, and rev that shit up to 10. *Thirt3en* is just unpolished enough to sound raunchy without being excessively sloppy. The production value is on the cheap, but

that "no overdubs, bang it out in one breathless take" approach totally works for this band. All they need is a dog bass, a jacked-up drum set and a slightly out of tune, fuzzy guitar with too much reverb on it to make rockers like "Grip," "Dead Girl," and "It's All About The Pussy" slash out of the speakers and kill. They do their thing with gusto. (AJ)

Zero Youth, 1976 Maple Tree Ln., Bolivar, MO 65613, www.zeroyouthrecords.com

Bubblegum Complex – Wonderkids, CDEP

It's never a good thing when five songs are such a chore to endure. These Tennesseans play an amateurish indie rock that insists on riding weak bass lines and fuzz pedals for minutes on end. That can't change listeners' apathy, as these songs have neither meat nor bones. (SM)

Heatstroke, PO Box 4349, Philadelphia, PA 19118, www.heatstrokerecords.com

🔊 Buried Inside – Chronoclast, CD

It seems a bit strange to hear music this complex and epic on Relapse. This is a concept album, not unlike *Godspeed You! Black Emperor*, but instead of remaining slow most of the songs, they jump to intense, metallic hardcore. The album was apparently written as one complete piece, and cut into tracks. You can tell that when listening, as all of the tracks flow very nicely together, and dynamically it sounds amazing. The build ups and gradual slowing to near silence is something to listen to as a whole, while reading the nicely presented insert. These Canadians really know how to write a piece of music. I highly recommend this to fans of heavier, dark hardcore such as Catharsis. Even exclusive GYBE fans should think this CD is great. (TK)

Relapse, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby, PA 19082, www.relapse.com

🔊 Burmese – Men, CD

Sometimes the line between something being good and something listenable is negotiable. Case in point: Like a lot of intelligent, dark noise, this album is something I enjoy, but can't see it in my heavy rotation. It can't be played while you're cooking dinner, doing laundry, reading, dancing or really doing anything humane; it's music to listen to while curled into a desperate fetal position. I don't mean that it's bad; it's actually very good. I've heard they're a more effective band live, but you'll get a pretty good feel for them by listening to this album, which is full of sludgy double bass, double drums and cat-screech vocals. Most of the songs deal with the dark, sinister side of male power and aggression (to the point of being uncomfortable), and they are a good reminder of what a supremely sad and menacing place the world can be. It's not for everyone, but if you like your music to hurt, then take a listen. (TG)

Load, PO Box 35, Providence, RI 02901, www.loadrecords.com

Bury The Needle – S/T, CD

Odd. I'm rarely this mixed on a record. There are moments on *Bury The Needle*'s record where I'm reminded of luminaries Drive Like Jehu and Ink And Dagger. Other times I'm reminded of shitty, metal sludge outta Seattle. Weird. (RL)

Self-released, www.burytheneedle.com

By Night – Burn The Flags, CD

Sweden strikes again with this solid death/thrash release. A definite hardcore element shines through but doesn't distract from the fact that this is a metal record at heart. A tad too compressed sounding, this disc is still unyielding in its approach. (DH)

Lifeforce, PO Box 680, Conshohocken, PA 19428, www.lifeforcerecords.com

By The End Of Night – A Tribute To Tigers, CDEP

A Tribute To Tigers is an instrumental math-rock record, with an occasional buried hardcore scream. Good musicianship, but at six-plus minutes a song, *By The End Of Night* is asking for a little too much. (RL)

Temporary Residence, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206, www.temporarystayresidence.com

Bystorm / Sauna – split, CD

Bystorm plays slow to midtempo hardcore with grisly, sporadic vocals. Sauna has a similar vocal style, but the music is faster and more spastic. I guess they could be considered "metal-core," but heavily on the hardcore end. It's good to know that hardcore is thriving in the Philippines. (TK)

Takefour Collective, PO Box 3900 CPO Manila 1000, Philippines, www.takefourcollective.com

Call And Response – Tiger Teeth, CDEP

Call And Response have a smooth female vocalist who reminds me of The Carpenters. She's backed by some cheesy '70s guitar that's fit for a porno soundtrack. With their cheeriness, I imagine them playing a lounge on the Love Boat—Doc ordering a beer from Isaac, scanning the dance floor. (BA)

Badman, www.badmanrecordingco.com

🔊 Capital Death – Carbon, 7"

The sleeve had me expecting crusty hardcore, but I'm hearing fast Japanese-style hardcore crossed with Septic Death. It sounds like they put distortion on everything, and it suits their sound well. Every song on here is great, though "Make A Change" is the standout. It's the only song without the lyrics printed, so it may be a cover. I can't explain on paper how great this is; you need to hear me verbally gushing about it to understand my love of this 7" properly. Buy two copies for when you wear out the first one. (DA)

Punks Before Profits, 537 Caroline St., Rochester, NY 14620, www.punksbeforeprofits.com

🔊 Capital Radio – S/T, CDEP

Some people appreciate punk rock, and some have a true love of it. This is the latter by tenfold. Composed of members of some of Boston's finest bands, this five-piece play the shit out of this four-song CD. Elements of hXc, old-school punk and a bit of skate rock are combined into the perfect killing machine. As Skotty Daltonic wails away on the mic and the band rips it up, you can't help but want to pump your fist in the air. The guitars have perfect use of punk lead guitar that you don't see much anymore, and the drums and bass are full and tight. Did I mention the lyrics? They're well-written and witty, painting story of deceit and lies. Look out for a new release Rancid Records soon. (DM)

Antietam Boston / self-released, www.capitalradio.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Amy Adoyzie (AA)

The Weakerthans, *Fallow*. Lesson 1: Opinions are subjective, and facts are objective. Lesson 2: Please make no mistake, what I am about to express in "Lesson 3" is completely objective, as it is a fact. Lesson 3: The Weakerthans are a remarkable band that should undoubtedly reserve slots in every human being's record collection. Lesson 4: I am totally right, see example. Example: I wasn't an instant fan of The Weakerthans; I felt like they were mostly hype, and the vocals were too nasally. Despite my first impression, they won me over with poetic meanderings that were angst-ridden without being too whiney. Former Propagandhi member JK Samson sheds that heavier sound, and with The Weakerthans he soothes us by penning lyrics that are our collective internal monologues. It's as if he's been sitting in the captain seat, navigating with us, jotting down notes on our progression and failures. I'll let his words speak for themselves, from "Confessions Of A Futon-Revolutionist": "Held like water in you shaking hands are all the small defeats a day demands / 10-6 or 9-5 trying, dying to survive / Never knowing what survival means / Leave the apartment to buy alcohol / Hang our diplomas on the bathroom wall." Lesson 5: Fine, if you won't listen to the music, will you at least make sure their lyric sheets are stuffed in your bookshelf?

CDs that I've burned for other people: Camera Obscura, *Underachievers Please Try Harder*; The Arcade Fire, *Funeral*; Songs:Ohia, *Axxess & Ace*; Van Morrison, *Moondance*; ADMF, *Rubbillions*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Agacki (DA)

Talk Is Poison, *S/T*. Talk Is Poison occupy a place in my heart right next to Econochrist. In the late '80s and early '90s, Econochrist was an under-appreciated hardcore band that appealed to crusties and regular hardcore kids at the same time. In the late '90s, Talk Is Poison had a similar appeal. I don't remember what year it was, but they played in Manitowoc, Wis. I hadn't heard them at that point; I just knew it would be a good show. My girlfriend at the time had an early curfew, so we had to leave before Talk Is Poison played. About a week later, I bought this CD, and it blew my mind—then the regret set in. This CD collects the tracks from their first 7" and their split 7" with Deathtreat. Their sound was a perfect mix of old-school hardcore and crust. The lyrics straddle the line of personal and political by covering meaningful issues in an easily relatable way. If all this weren't enough, I recently realized that the guitarist used to be in the Milwaukee bands Animal Farm and Demise. It's a small world.

Rockin' Into The Night: Mensclub, *Comin' To Take You Away*; Poison Idea, *Pick Your King*; Regulations, both 7-inches; DC3, *Vida*; Rapeman, *Two Nuns And A Pack Mule*.

**Capillary Action – Fragments, CD**

This is a lot of instrumental fragments, some of which work, some of which don't. The music runs the gamut from metal to soft, ethereal pieces and even a bossa nova. Multi-instrumentalist Jonathan Pfeffer may put out a great album someday if he focuses more on continuity. (SJ)
Pangaea, PO Box 142, Oberlin, OH 44074, www.pangaearecordings.com

Cass McCombs – PRefection, enhanced CD

The bio hints at a Smiths influence, and the vocals remind me of Morrissey. The overall feel of PRefection is the same one you get from listening to the Smiths. Someone call the Strokes and tell them to take a seat, Cass McCombs is here to blow them away. (DA)
Monitor, PO Box 2361, Baltimore, MD 21203, www.monitorrecords.com

Caterpillar Tracks – S/T, CD

This band sounds heavily influenced by Fugazi: choppy and fast rhythms, melancholy melodies and a singer who alternates between sounding slightly whiny and screaming. They pull it off pretty well, though the singer lacks the range and individuality that could make them a really good band. (JJG)
Phratry, PO Box 14267, Cincinnati, OH 45250, www.phratryrecords.com

Catch 22 – Live, CD/DVD

Neat little CD/DVD combo featuring the ever-popular ska-punk outfit Catch 22 live in Farmingdale, NY. The record's composed of 21 tracks, including favorites "Dear Sergio" and "1234 1234." The DVD presents the entire set in 5.1 surround sound and includes bonus material. The only complaint is the omission of "Kristina." (BN)
Victory, 346 N. Justine St., Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Cex – Starship Galactica, CD

Remastering of Rjvan Kidwell's 2001 album with added tracks. Cex doesn't rap on this album, but he does grace us with some horribly unfunny skits. Skits aside, this is pretty good space-out laptop dance music. Those who seek a heavy bass line should look elsewhere, though. (TG)
Temporary Residence, PO Box 60096, Brooklyn, NY 11206, www.temporaryresidence.com

Chin Up Chin Up – We Should Have Never Lived Like We Were Skyscrapers, CD

Living in Chicago, it's hard to escape Chin Up Chin Up, who also live here. Likewise, when bass player Chris Saathoff was killed by a hit-and-run driver last year, the city's sizeable rock scene shuttered. Saathoff's death, combined with the band's resilience and overall excellence have put their name on the tips of everyone's tongues. Unlike some of the city's more hyped indie-rock bands, Chin Up lives up to the hype. This is excellent indie rock, a perfect balance of picky guitar, bass, percussion, some electronics, vocal harmonies and more. All of it's nicely layered, giving the record a rich sound. This is music that stands on top of the broad shoulders of their Chicago indie-rock forebears. They're just short of perfection, though. The vocals are buried in the mix, which works at first, but then they just sound unconfident and undeveloped. With more prominent, strong vocals, Chin Up Chin Up could become unstoppable. Here's hoping they continue to live up to the hype. (KR)

Flameshovel, 1658 N. Milwaukee Ave., #276, Chicago, IL 60647, www.flameshovel.com

Choose Your Own Adventure – The Long Defeat, CD

Instrumental rock doesn't always translate into excitement, but this is an exception. Ranging from the aptly titled "Fog Walk" to the math rock of "Luca Brasi," CYOA excel at everything. A personal favorite is "Progress

Report," which blends moody rhythms and swirling guitars to a rising crescendo. (MS)

Sit-N-Spin, 118 Estes Dr., Carboro, NC 27510, www.sit-n-spinrecords.com

Chris Stamey Experience, The – A Question Of Temperature, CD

Look at this as three albums in one, starting with the bookends. First up: Covers of the likes of the Yardbirds, Les McCann and Television that do little to cover the bald and gray that block the rock of ex-db's leader Stamey and his Experience, which happens to be none other than Yo La Tengo. At the butt end is an impotent, 30-second call to arms called "VOTE," which drove the album in its previous release just before the 2004 presidential election. The middle third could pass as a darn-fine Yo La Tengo, with Stamey handling the vocals. "Sleepless Nights" is languid, baked and full of the deep sigh that envelops Yo La Tengo's growing-old stage, while "McCauley Street" allows guitarist Ira Kaplan his requisite 10-minute allotment to molest his instrument. It's too bad the rest of the CD has all the nuance and recklessness of a two-star date movie. (TS)

Yep Roc, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515, www.yeproc.com

Circles Over Sidelights – What Is And What Is To Become . . . , CD

I reviewed their first CD and enjoyed it, and their songwriting has improved a lot since. Technical, somewhat melodic hardcore played with just enough emotion not to sound whiney or irritating. These kids are great musicians and show it with this release. This is a solid recording. (TK)
Immigrant Sun, PO Box 150711, Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.immigrantsun.com

Clarity Process – Killing The Precedent, CD

CP is a better-than-average screamo band who uses a delay pedal, keyboard and a sampler with some catchy hooks. They sound like other bands in this genre, but they definitely have a more distinct, well-arranged sound. (EH)

Rise, PO Box 135, Roseburg, OR 97470, www.riserecords.com

Classical Ass – After Lunch We Kill Tony, CD

Starting with the artwork and lyrics, this is plain ridiculous. Overlooking their lack of visual and lyrical eloquence, the music isn't bad. I may go as far as to say I really like a lot of these songs. A good mix of garage surf and NoMeansNo-style weirdness. Impressive. (TK)

Diaphragm, PO Box 10388, Columbus, OH 43201, www.diaphragmrecords.com

Coachwhips, The – Peanut Butter And Jelly Live At The Ginger Minge, CD

This sounds a lot like the last Coachwhips album, but when you have a good formula, why mess with it? Broken-mic distortion, fuzzed out guitar, cheap organ and pounding drums over a bluesy, warped rock 'n' roll sound. The songs are fast, and the album goes by quickly, but I'd rather want more than be bored. (JJG)

Narnack, 381 Broadway, 4th Fl. #3, New York, NY 10013, www.narnackrecords.com

Cold Bleak Heat – It's Magnificent, But It Isn't War, CD

This shit'll blow your mind if you let it. This drums/bass/sax/trumpet free/avant-garde/improv combo featuring veteran sax player Paul Flaherty aren't necessarily doing anything too far from what Ornette Coleman was playing 40 years ago, but it's a solid and engaging take on that subset of jazz. Where it's short on easy to grasp melody, this recording more than makes up for it with energy, strong improvisation and compelling experimentation. It's probably not something every single reader of a mag with the word "punk" in the title would love, but the more free jazz leaning and freakout-friendly people should snap this up like free drugs. (RR)

Family Vineyard, PO Box 12243, Raleigh, NC 27605, www.family-vineyard.com

Color Guard, The – Dark Pop, CD

"Female-fronted prog-rock band with indie-rock leanings" would be the best way to describe this band. Or "bland punks who love to create music for epic Dungeons & Dragons adventures." Or even "make it stop." (DM)
Suzblade Music / self-released, www.colorguard.com

Color Of Day – Dress Casualty, CDEP

Musically, this is a mix of indie screamo and MTV-style screamo. The singer of this band reminds me a whole lot of the guy from At The Drive-In. This wasn't bad at all, but sounded too much like something I've already heard. (KM)

Self-released, www.colorofday.com

Coma Recovery, The – Man Ascend, CD

Do you like some pentagrams with your horn-rimmed glasses? Some blood with your tears? Metal, meet emo. In the midst of the musical onslaught they do a nice job of creating drama with well-timed starts and stops and the juxtaposition of different types of guitar licks. (DAL)

Self-released, www.thecomarecovery.com

Conelrad – A Final Dissolution, CD

Extraordinarily highbrow, both musically and lyrically, Pittsburgh's insane prog-metal-hardcore two-piece is back with their first full-length. That a band can be this out there and not come off as a pretentious art-rock mess is beyond me, but Conelrad somehow pull it off, making their bizarre hardcore fusion cocktail work. (AE)

New Addition, PO Box 81162, Pittsburgh, PA 15217, newadditionmedia@hotmail.com

Conformists, The – Two Hundred, CD

Musically, these guys are of the "minimalist art-punk" persuasion. Vocationally, it sounds like bad poetry being shouted/sung along to music that could also use some help. I want to see some aspect that I can dig but overall, but this a bit disappointing unless you like The Fall. (DM)

Collective, PO Box 22172, St. Louis, MO 63116, www.collectiverecords.com

Constants – Nostalgia For The Future, CD

The prog invasion of indie rock continues. The Boston act comes across as a harder rocking Yes on its first full-length, with spacey keyboards, cymbal flourishes and light vocals that sound as if they're in orbit. There's enough noodling and effects for guitar geeks and Brian Eno-junkies alike. (TM)

Radar, PO Box 1205 Allston, MA 02134, www.radarrecordings.com

Cops, The – Why Kids Go Wrong, CDEP

"Protection Act," the third track on this too-short EP by the 9-month-old Seattle band is an indication that we might have another Walkmen amongst us. Its sinister bass walk, dub-rock guitar jabs and Michael Jaworski's "I mean it!" vocals genuinely threaten to give up the good stuff with a regularity. (SM)

Mt. Fuji, www.mtfujiirecords.com

Cornflames – The Farewell Drive, CD

I don't know what kind of name "Cornflames" is, but these guys are pretty damned good. They play very catchy, very pleasant indie rock that you might expect to find on No Idea. Two members share vocal duties, one having a slightly more hoarse, Hot Water Music style, while the other has a slightly high-pitched voice. The music is tuneful, with head-nodding melodies and sing-along choruses, great guitar interplay, alternating vocals and muted guitar buildups. Fans of the Jealous Sound and Jimmy Eat World should check these guys out. (NS)

Engineer, 1 Chandos Rd., Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2NY, UK, www.engineerrecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Abbie Amadio (AJA)

The Halo Benders, The Rebels Not In. A combination that comes off sounding strange, but makes a lot of sense, The Halo Benders' mixture of two indie-rock figureheads, Doug Martsch and Calvin Johnson, proved both satisfying and frustrating. Downplaying the pop deconstruction of Beat Happening, while intertwining the quirky pop of Built To Spill, *The Rebels Not In* does it best in comfortably putting together such disjointed harmonies. As primarily a Built To Spill enthusiast, I initially hoped that Johnson would sit out the majority of songs. His husky drone can be hard to take; however, that tension is what made the Halo Benders, as well as Beat Happening, unique. Johnson's crooked baritone sours Martsch's sometimes sugary, boyish tunefulness. The creation of odd harmonies with such recognizable voices both lessens and strengthens the other. Not to mention, there are some very catchy melodies on this record. Most notably, the first track, "Virginia Reel Around The Fountain," which perfectly blends both styles and personalities.

1-2-3-4-5 . . . Spoon, *Kill The Moonlight*; L Pierre, *Touchpool*; WMSE; Stephen Malkmus And The Jicks, *Pig Lib*; Ulysses.010, S/T.

Coulier – Cool, Cooler, Coulier, CD

You gotta approach this one with jazz ears. Yeah, Coulier is a rock band, in the sense that they play guitars, but the music is coming more from the land of free jazzers like Eric Dolphy. As straight-up rock music, it's boring, but as jazz-metal fusion, it works. (AJ)
Stickfigure, PO Box 55462, Atlanta, GA 30308, www.stickfigurerecords.com

Counterpoise – Lest We Forget, CD

This retrospective of Cincinnati's anti-establishment dirty punk band features 19 Desert Storm-bashing chest-thumpings that mostly blow off steam instead of doing anything impressive musically. Dumpy recordings will have you turning the volume knob as far right as it will go just to make out the angry poly-sci dishings. (SM)
Terraphile, PO Box 317741, Cincinnati, OH 45231

☿ Coyote – S/T, CDEP

Music from the seedy side of town, this debut EP from Philadelphia psych-rock quartet Coyote is full of pounding piano beats, fuzzy guitars and howling/painful vocals. It feels like a long night gone very, very wrong while taking a whiskey bender in the Deep South. Somehow you stumbled into the wrong backwards bar at the right time and happened to see this band playing. You stayed a spell, drank an entire bottle of whiskey and woke up the next morning with a pain in your side, inflicted no doubt by some strange voodoo-hex the band worked up on your behalf. You traveled back home, bought this creepy-good album and poured yourself another drink. (TG)
Birdman, 441 Victory Blvd. Suite C, South San Francisco, CA 94080, www.birdmanrecords.com

Crazy Mary – Thirsty For Cool, CD

If you can't tell from the name of the band and the album, Crazy Mary is a little out of touch. Stuck in one of those dopey '60s psych-pop ruts, this female-fronted band at least seems to have a good time playing together. I guess that's what it's all about. (LW)
Humstring / self-released, 300 E. 34th St., 36th Floor, New York, NY 10016, www.crazymary.com

☿ Crooked Fingers – Dignity And Shame, CD

When Eric Bachman formed Crooked Fingers after the dissolution of Archers Of Loaf in 1998, the project was meant to be a break from the off-kilter, noise-pop that made his former band such indie darlings. On the first Crooked Fingers album, Bachman shed the jarring guitar, guttural howls, obscure lyrics and replaced that sound with finger picking, impassioned singing and honest libretto—a really brave move. Four albums later, Crooked Fingers' sound has evolved into rich, refined indie pop. Bachman's raspy vocals and acoustic strumming remains the centerpiece on this album, but the Latin influences that were first heard on *Red Devil Dawn* come to fruition. The opening instrumental, "Islero," with its Span-

ish guitar and mariachi trumpet, sets the tone of the album. In addition to the standard guitar, bass and drums, conga, lap steel and orchestral flourishes surface throughout, enriching the sound. "Call To Love," one of the standout tracks, is a melody-driven masterpiece, heightened by the harmonies of Lara Meyerratken. Other favorites include "Valerie," an upbeat, albeit creepy, love song, and "Sleep All Summer," a pretty lullaby that's heavy on the lap steel. Overall, this is the most sophisticated Crooked Fingers effort yet. (LW)

Merge, PO Box 1235, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, www.mergerecords.com

Cursed – Hell Comes Home, 7"

Two tracks of thrashing hardcore goodness, perfect for His Hero is Gone and Tragedy fans. And as a special bonus, the B-side is a pretty ravaging and intense cover of "Search And Destroy" (Stooges, duh). Definitely worth checking out. (MG)

Hanging Like a Hex, 201 Maple Lane N., Syracuse, NY 13212, www.hanginghex.com

Cursed – Two, CD

These Canadian heavy-hitters return with a second full-length of thick, severe hardcore. Mostly midpaced, Cursed step it up every once in awhile to keep things interesting, but mainly they rely on life-threatening heaviness. Although some riffs could have been super brutal even slower, one can't blame them for keeping things moving. (DH)

Goodfellow, 22 Wilson St., Hamilton, Ontario, L8R 1C5, Canada, www.goodfellowrecords.com

☿ Curtains, The – Vehicles Of Travel, CD

With its dreamy synths, irregular drumbeats and layers of ambient noise, this album creates a film score to an imagined horror movie that possibly involves scary carnivals, traveling thugs and mythical creatures. Unlike the first two Curtains albums, which were mostly filled with experimental sound fragments and sketches, this new album features actual songs and vocals(!). It still feels more like a series of snippets from a fantastic parallel universe than a pop album though, and the Deerhoof comparisons are inevitable (because two of the members are part of that band). I found myself digging it in the same way I spazz out whenever I listen to Deerhoof—meaning once you let go of your expectations and simply let the happy weirdness wash over you, there's a lot to enjoy here. There is some truly beautiful, jagged guitar playing, which often scatters and drops off in the middle of nowhere; this, like the album, will either leave you feeling jolted and confused or delighted like a little kid on a carnival ride. (TG)

Frenetic, PO Box 640434, San Francisco, CA 94164, www.freneticrecords.com

Cyness – Loony Planet / Industriality, CD

Um, can I have seconds, please? Completely crushing German grindcore with a hint of crusty thrash thrown in for good measure. Twenty-two

songs of pure speed and little to no amounts of fucking around. I love this label. (DH)

Sound Pollution, PO Box 17743, Covington, KY 41017, www.sound-pollution.com

Damage Manual, The – S/T, CD

With ties to KMFDM, Pigface, The Revolting Cocks and Killing Joke, The Damage Manual has a healthy lineage of past experience. I don't foresee similar success on this jaunt, however. The Damage Manual specialize in lackluster, midtempo rock with substandard and grating vocals—not recommended. (SJM)

Underground, Inc., PO Box 16008, Chicago, IL 60616, www.undergroundinc.com

Darediablo – Twenty Paces, CD

As instrumental music goes, this just kind of wriggles and jumps around a bit. It's solid, but not especially innovative or seemingly capable of rising above interesting background music status. (RR)
Southern, PO Box 577375, Chicago, IL 60657, www.southern.com

☿ Dead Meadow – Feathers, CD

Dead Meadow is a tripped out, moody, alternative rock band that exists somewhere between the crunch of Dinosaur Jr and the opiate grooves of Jane's Addiction. It sounds like they start with a laid-back foundation of shimmering guitar tones and gloomy, slurred melodies and build the songs up with some fuzz and grit for added texture. It comes across as a little artsy, but it works for 'em. Vocalist Jason Simon sounds either really tired or really high (or maybe both), and the band falls in line right behind him, executing each note, each passage, with a drowsy aesthetic most commonly found in delta blues tunes. Not exactly stoner rock, in the Acid King sense, but definitely smokin' music. (AJ)
Matador, 625 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, www.matadorrecords.com

Dead Science, The – Bird Bones In The Bughouse, CD

This Seattle trio trades in their region's quirky pop lean for shimmering and atmospheric noir. Their heavy jazz influence brings post-rock comparisons, but this is neither challenging nor inaccessible as frontman Sam Mickens croons from the seedy nightclubs Nick Cave patronizes. (VC)
Absolutely Kosher, 1412 10th St., Berkeley, CA 94710, www.absolutelykosher.com

Deep Possession – Welcome To The Show, CD

AA-battery-powered hip-hop, as led by some guy, his best Cookie Monster voice and his stories about ambiguous figures with gibberish names. Which leads us to believe that he'd be fun at a party, though most likely would prefer to be left alone with his role-playing games. (TS)
Self-released, www.deeppossession.com

☿ Del Cielo – Us Vs. Them, CD

Mixing delicate yet robust indie-pop melodies with sudden bursts of boisterous rock influences, Del Cielo has delivered a record that should

Reviewer Spotlight: Bill Angelbeck (BA)

The Ex, 1936: The Spanish Revolution (EP). What the Gang of Four were to Marxism, The Ex are to anarchism. With this EP, their anarchism was expressed most fully. It was released in 1986 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Spanish Revolution of 1936, anarchism's major success story. Hundreds of collectives sprang up in the rural areas across most of Spain. In the cities, particularly Barcelona, factories and workshops became worker-owned. This experiment lasted about three years, before Franco's fascist army with help from Hitler and Mussolini overran the area. To honor their accomplishments, The Ex composed a small hardcover book of photographs (144 pages) taken by CNT and FAI members (the two major unions) during that revolutionary period. They also wrote some short articles about the revolution. In the front and back covers were 7" singles containing the four songs. (The smaller version released later by AK Press contains two mini-CDs.) The songs are partly derived from anarchist songs and writings of the time, like "They Shall Not Pass" and "People Again." The other two tracks are sung in Spanish, and the guitar work incorporates some Spanish elements as well, though with The Ex's speed and abrasiveness. The drumbeats and bass can sound militaristic and driving, while the vocals, often chanting, have an air of cheer and defiance. These four songs show The Ex in high form, no doubt due to their investment into the project. The book they produced with it makes for a solid introduction to the Spanish Revolution.

What keeps me going: Matt Sweeney & Bonnie "Prince" Billy, *Superwolf*; Black Mountain, *S/T*; Mephista, *Entomological Reflections*; Six Organs Of Admittance, *School Of The Flower* (reviewed this issue); and a documentary on The Weather Underground.

Reviewer Spotlight: Jay Castaldi (JC)

Black Flag, *Jealous Again*. In 1985, I was in eighth grade, listening to shitty metal and reading *Circus* magazine. I didn't have many friends, and I was realizing that the few kids I did hang out with were jerks. An older kid I sorta knew was into punk rock, and he told me crazy stories about seeing Black Flag play in Chicago. I had seen ads for Black Flag records in *Circus* that always intrigued me, partly because of the provocative cover art and partly because their records were so cheap—only \$6 post-paid. I could afford that on my allowance, so I ordered *My War* and thus began my exploration of punk-rock music. A couple months later I bought *Jealous Again*, and it blew my mind. Five raging songs with a total running time of about six minutes, it managed to be both angrier and more fun than *My War*, and unlike anything I'd ever heard. For me there was no turning back after *Jealous Again*, and I consider it a big part of the person I am today just for the path that it put me on some 20 years ago. The record still holds up, too. A few years ago my band did a set of all Black Flag covers, and learning to play these songs, taking them apart and figuring out the different structures, was really satisfying. Approaching the record in this new way helped me realize what well-written songs these are, and it made me proud of my eighth-grade self for recognizing it way back then.

Five: Patton Oswalt, *222 CD*; The Reatards, *Bedroom Disasters CD* (reviewed this issue); The Rock & Roll Stormtroopers, *On Fire LP*; The Suspicions, "We're All Wrong" 7"; Whiskey Sunday, *Maldecido CD* (reviewed this issue).



entrench it firmly as one of the top independent bands to watch in 2005. The record's success is a testament to the writing, which seamlessly blends scene politics ("Wreck," "Richmond") and personal issues ("Cry Your Eyes Out," "You Win"), creating songs with character and feeling. What further drives the record is the interplay between vocalist/guitarist Andrea Lisi and bassist/vocalist Basla Andolsun all set against the thundering backdrop of Katy Otto's drumming. This is definitely a band worth keeping a close eye on. (BN)

Lovitt, PO Box 100248, Arlington, VA 22210-9998, www.lovitt.com

Deloreans -- . . . Are Your Girlfriend's Favorite Band, 7"

Your girlfriend's favorite band is apparently composed of three Italian guys who look like the lead singer of the Futureheads and one guy who doesn't. A horny punk-rock energy fuels the ship, the love lines and the guitars. Tuneful and snappy, the Deloreans' spastic come-hither delivery skips the foreplay. (SM)

Self-released, c/o Franz Barcella, Via Cortivo 34, 24067, Sarnico, Italy, deloreans@tiscali.it

Demon's Claws -- S/T, CD

The Demon's Claws somehow managed to obtain some of Jeffrey Lee Pierce's guitar slides and The Oblivians bleeding, blown out amplifiers for this recording. These tracks were undoubtedly finished in a Zen Arcade, one-take fashion. Personally, I like my music like I like my coffee: cheap and low-grade. If you're like me, you'll love this record. (RL)

Dead Canary, PO Box 10276, Columbus, OH 43201, www.deadcanaryrecords.com

Destrux -- Enter The Thrash Kick, 7"

This is what Filth would have sounded like had they actually been good. With some Void-like guitar parts thrown into the mix, this sounds like skate thrash. It's not ground-breaking, but I can look past that. When a band pulls off a sound this well, you won't hear me complaining. (DA)

Punks Before Profits, 537 Caroline St., Rochester, NY 14620, www.punksbeforeprofits.com

Detonations -- Spy You In A Magazine, 7"

Apparently this New Orleans band's spazzy, feedback-drenched garage/punk doesn't translate well to recording. Side A is fun, if slightly flat, and Side B features a so-so Chrome cover, "TV Has Eyes." Great trashy live band, but this LP is just OK. (TG)

Big Neck, PO Box 8144, Reston, VA 20195, www.bigneckrecords.com

Devaney, Martin -- La Mancha, CD

Devaney's latest effort finds him and his cohorts embracing a punchier, louder sound, creating a masterful record that's equal parts indie rock and pop. The introspective writing adds substance to the sound. "Is That You?" and "Meeting Like This" are two gems on a disc that shines brightly throughout. (BN)

Edectone, www.edectonerecords.com

Devil In A Woodpile -- In Your Lonesome Town, CD

Lonesome Town could have been recorded 70 years ago. Devil In A Woodpile play totally antique-sounding jump-blues without any amplification. All the instruments are positively turn of the century (the 20th century, that is): harmonica, washboard, clarinet, jug, kick drum, upright bass, guitar. Vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Rick "Cookin'" Sherry sounds like a 250-pound Louisianan, not some guy who lives in the nation's third largest city (Chicago) and plays every week at a bar located in the middle of an industrial wasteland. If Lonesome Town weren't on CD and lacked its great production, you'd have no idea when this was recorded. To pull off a sound so authentically really takes dedication to craft, and Devil In A

Woodpile aren't alt-country pretenders. They're the real deal, anachronisms living among the chaos of the big city. Check them out. (KR)

Bloodshot, 3039 W. Irving Park Road, Chicago, IL 60618, www.bloodshotrecords.com

Devil Is Electric, The -- I've Never Trusted A Revolutionary That Was Afraid To Dance And A Bunch Of Other Stuff, CD

Going in, I was skeptical. But there's more to this CD than a hand-drawn cover and 25 rudimentary pop-punk songs. The Devil Is Eclectic gets by with sheer exuberance, writing short, punchy tunes that are political, but always uplifting. It's a pure celebration of playing punk rock with your left-leaning pals. (TM)

Plan-It-X, PO Box 3521 Bloomington, IN 47402, www.plan-it-x.com

Devil Makes Three, The -- Longjohns, Boots, And A Belt, CD

Ragtime/blues/folk/bluegrass three-piece bathed in the whole Americana thing. Original tunes, played on string bass, acoustic guitars and banjo that sound really old—think Leadbelly, the Carter Family and the like. Cool if you're into this stuff. (AJ)

Self-released, www.thedevilmakesthree.com

Devolver -- Life Science, CD

Building a discordant groove, Devolver's loosely delivered melodies, as well as vocals, are broodingly even-tempered. At times, the vocals fluctuate between too sharp or flat, but don't sound amateur. Their instrumentations build slowly and fade rather than explode, which is nice, lending to an unanticipated unpredictability. (AJA)

Lifeboat, PO Box 640228, San Francisco, CA 94164, www.lifeboatrecords.com

Dexateens, The -- Red Dust Rising, CD.

The Dexateens shake their tambourines with a swagger, but their second CD for Estrus is much more 1974 boogie than balls-out. They sound comfortable with their "Sticky Fingers" sing-alongs, and it almost makes it easy to forgive their Southern whines. (TS)

Estrus, PO Box 2125, Bellingham, WA 98227, www.estrus.com

Diamond Nights -- So Fantastic, CDEP

Danceable pop rock with a small dose of new-wave synthability. It sounds like a combination of the Cars, Psychedelic Furs and T. Rex. Although I love it when bands can pull off catchy dance music with rock guitar sounds, the falsetto vocal leads and uber-rock solos can get slightly cheesy. (MG)

Kemado, 601 W. 26th St., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10001, www.kemado.com

Die Monitr Batss -- Girls Of War, CD

DMB is one part broken-yet-unstoppable dance machine, one part art punk and a final part of "My god man, what is that fascinating noise?" The bass leads the attack with spastic guitar and saxophone in tow that's equally balanced by the beat down of the drums. The frontman and backing female vocals are so full of nervous energy that they make you edgy, yet still draw you in. DMB are modern-day sirens drawing you closer your doom. As the Gossip take a break, this side project aims at to be a full-time gig. Put your dancing shoes on, man—the soundtrack for the end is here! (DM)

Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow St. Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com

Dispensing Of False Halos -- Growing Up, Giving In, CDEP

Angry, Midwest-sounding screamo/metalcore. There are enough incoherent riffs and circle-kick breakdowns in this to make me glad I moved away from the geographical center of the country. It's not inherently bad, but throughout every one of these eight screaming tracks, there is nothing

that won me over. (TK)

Init, PO Box 871 Sioux Falls, SD 57101, www.initrecords.com

DMBQ -- The Essential Sounds From The Far East, CD

Personally, I get a kick out of the way DMBQ's drums—credited to the entire nation of China, though the quartet hails from Japan—best resemble the grinding teeth of someone with a severe anxiety disorder. But on this, the band's US debut, there is much more to like: the piledriver riffs, the way Shinji Masuko yelps in broken English like a startled cat, the nods to stoner-noise groups such as High Rise as well as Japan's quaint garage acts. It's good stuff and at its best, the most-frantic release ever to bear the Estrus logo. "She Walks" blisters. "Happening" burns like the most-fascinating STD. "Nothing" drives my Ford Escort off a cliff at 160 mph and flips me the bird from the wreckage below. (TS)

Estrus, PO Box 2125, Bellingham, WA 98227, www.estrus.com

Doe, John -- Forever Hasn't Happened Yet, CD

I'm not all that familiar with John Doe's post-X work. I've heard bits and pieces of some of his solo records and liked 'em enough, but I wasn't knocked out by anything. The same goes for this new one. I mean the guy can still write a tune, but nothing here is on the level of "The Have Nots" or "World's A Mess, It's In My Kiss." I guess he set the bar so high with those first four X albums that it's hard for him to measure up to that standard. Judged on its own merit, this album isn't bad. It has a stripped down sound—kinda bluesy and country-ish at times. Plus, there are a ton of guests, including Neko Case and Kristin Hersh. (AJ)

Yep Roc, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515, www.yeproc.com

Dog Assassin -- S/T, 7"

Another peace-punk, animal-loving, anarchist single that is crazy out of control. Guess what? "Bottom Of The Food Chain" and "Assassinate Sexism" are two of my favorite cliché tracks. I am sure that the only people who will buy this record already agree with the message, so what is the point? (EA)

Spacemint, 5120 Idiebury Way, Reno, NV 89523, www.spacemintreno.com

Don't Mess With Texas -- S/T, CD

Long, droning instrumental indie rock songs that revolve around a simple piano part—but it's not bad. Most of the songs begin mellow, but build to a powerful climax and sometimes back again. The guitar parts wail when they kick in, and the bass and drums work well together. (NS)

MoonLee, Pot na breg 8, 5250 Solkan, Slovenia, www.moonleerecords.com

Douglas, Charles -- Statecraft, CD

Statecraft, featuring Joey Santiago (Pixies) on guitar, is playfully upbeat with its comfortable rhythms, catchy melodies and tongue-in-cheek lyrics. Santiago's signature guitar playing adds a sharper dimension to Douglas's flaky pop rock. In combining jagged guitar chords over bouncy rhythms, Douglas does especially well on "Revelation In Chapel Hill"—one of the best songs on the album. The influence of other quirky types (i.e., Jonathon Richman) is heard on "Statecraft," where Douglas's vocal style is very reminiscent of Richman. Having memorable melodies and a sense of humor, Statecraft combines more lightweight song structures with both offbeat and earthy guitar parts, making it a fun and interesting listen. (AJA)

Enabler, 300 Elizabeth St., New York, NY 10012, www.indieonline.com

Downtown Singapore -- Understanding A Guarantee, CDEP

The first EP from this young, DC-based emo act (sorry, guys) is an acceptable take on the genre, harkening back to the early days of Jimmy Eat

Reviewer Spotlight: Vincent Chung (VC)

Mike Judge And Old Smoke, *Sights*. While we don't often stick to this, the main reason for the Reviewer Spotlights is to highlight a forgotten gem in punk's archives. For this issue, I've chosen a record that draws plenty of guffaws and has been forcibly forgotten in hardcore's collective memory. Spent on the brutal NYHC tour de force that was Judge, Mike Judge retreated from hardcore and penned an album's worth of acoustic songs. What listeners get are 10 haunting tracks of soft folk/country rock that nod heavily to Neil Young, even right down to the vocal treatment. It's eerie and vulnerable on its own, but if you remember that it's the singer for Judge at the helm, it's all kinds of fucked up. Lyrically, Mike Judge exorcises various personal issues, which makes the delicate vocals and quiet strumming seem even more naked. Many bands that attempt this sound try to recreate an aesthetic, but Mike Judge's solo record is raw sincerity, coming off much more than a mere mimicry. The album literally offers imagery of a cross-country motorcycle jaunt à la Easy Rider, and I'd like to think that this was written under the dark, lonely skies of the Arizona desert. It seems fitting, at least.

Like Johnny Walker at 7 a.m.: The Reposs, LP; Cut The Shit, Marked For Life CD; Headache City 7"; Self Defense, Megatonpunkdisruptor 7"; Call The Police, demo.

World and the Get Up Kids. Their bio talks of their desire to explore keyboard and electronic textures, which will hopefully happen. Seriously, no more Cyndi Lauper covers. (TM)
DCide 1926 14th St. NW, 2nd Floor, Washington, DC 20009 www.dtownrock.com

Drag The River – Hey Buddies... CDEP

I've championed DTR in these pages for a couple of years now, and EP shows why. Although they're lumped into alt-country, these guys play with so much soul that they blow pretenders out of the water. Get this and all their other releases. (KR)

Mars Motors, 1608 W. Mountain Ave., Fort Collins, CO 80521, www.marsmotors.com

Dreamfast – In Armor, CD

Excellent pop-punk from down in Arkansas that keeps it simple, and because of that, it succeeds wildly. Female vocals add an even poppier feel, and the songwriting never gets complex to the point of being too technical for a pop-punk band. Seek this out for a good, honest pop fix. (DH)
Self-released, www.dreamfastrock.com

Droom – S/T, CD

Industrial goth-pop, heavy on the synths, complete with obtuse lyrics shrouded in black and steeped in bloodstained torpor. The perfect soundtrack for any cyberpunk movie filmed circa 1992. (TG)
Self-released, www.droom-music.com

Dumbwaiters – Musick, CD

A complete mess of retro keyboards, distorted guitars, screeched vocals, groovy bass lines and all sorts of odd psychedelic noises. From Tampa, Fla., this is drugged-out metal that comes across like the Flaming Lips covering Blue Cheer. It's glorious. (TM)
Fiani / self-released, PO Box 311111 Tampa, FL 33604, www.screwmusicforever.com/dumbwaiters

Dun2Def – S/T, CD

Pretty straight-forward punk with an occasional ode to the Ramones or the Stiff Little Fingers. The vocalist's singing/talking style is a bit unusual, and the melodies tend to melt together from track to track, but I can see this band making something of itself. This record being the first step. (BN)
D Generate, 316-265 E. 15th Ave. Vancouver, BC V5T 4K4, Canada

Duvall – O Holy Night, CD

Josh Caterer never disguised his spirituality in the Smoking Popes, and Duvall's debut full-length was even heavier with it. His soaring, angelic pipes would be the jewel of any choir. These 10 Christmas songs take on a little more electric guitar than Bing Crosby would allow, but stay true. (SM)
Asian Man, PO Box 35585, Monte Sereno, CA 95030, www.asianmanrecords.com

Earl Greyhound – S/T, CDEP

Straight-ahead rock 'n' roll with a Southern twinge fills this debut EP. The riffs are good, and the male/female vocals work really well. There are a few low points (falsetto on Track three), but it's a good starting

point. (MP)

Some, 345 7th Ave., 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10001, www.some.com

Echo Is Your Love – Paper Cut Eye, CD

Technical and somewhat messy "post-hardcore" that is, overall, a little confusing. Harsh vocals vie for attention among a vat of disharmonious, noisy guitar lines and pounding drums. A bit too much going on for the most part, though some of the more toned down, Joy Division-esque songs are enjoyable. (MG)

If Society, Jyväskylä 7 as 1, 00550 Helsinki, Finland, www.ifsociety.com

Edie Sedgwick – Her Love Is Real... But She Is Not, CD

No, Warhol Factory "superstar" Edie Sedgwick has not risen from the grave, but rather she is channeled by Justin Moyer of the Dischord bands El Guapo and Antelope. Moyer/Edie gives us 14 tracks, all about celebrities and all featuring Edie's finest diva moves lathered over some well-constructed electronic music. Is it ironic? Is it post-ironic? Who cares? All I know is this is perhaps the finest album ever made. Am I being ironic? Post-ironic? Who cares? Get in the spirit. "Relapse, recovery!" she chants, fashionista-style, on "Robert Downey, Jr." It's not all fun and games, though. It's also totally post-modern. Check out the opening line from "Martin Sheen": "This song is not about Vietnam / this song is what Vietnam was really like / In saying this, Vietnam becomes this song." The synth-driven backing music is spare, but complicated, and it insinuates itself in your head, always keeping you off-guard. Oh yeah, and this wonderful package also comes with a manifesto. Consider me converted. (DAL)

DeSoto, PO Box 60932, Washington DC 20039, www.desotorecords.com

Egon – All Theory And No Action, CD

Several songs emulate early Modest Mouse rhythms and Built To Spill guitar pop. The first track reuses the broken heart/glue image from Nirvana's "Dumb." Yet panning Egon's accessible, guitar-driven and keyboard-accented indie rock would be cruel and unfair. When Egon is original, its music is disciplined, dynamic, uplifting and promising. (JM)

Has Anyone Ever Told You, PO Box 161702, Austin, TX 78716, www.hasanyonevertoldyou.com

86'ed, The / Reason To Fight – split, 7"

Both bands sound very similar here playing old-school hardcore punk in the vein of early Black Flag. Both play at warp speed with tough-guy growling—nothing too exciting to report back. (AJA)
United Riot, www.angelfire.com/indie/unitedriotrecords/

Eluvium – Talk Amongst The Trees, CD

Matthew Cooper, who writes and records under the name Eluvium, left me awestruck with his last record. In a daring departure, Cooper has left the easily cited genius of his piano-founded balladry in order to work his magic in the form of dense atmospheric swells and ebbs. Although many listeners may not be able to attribute Cooper's raw talent to his latest challenge, it is this pseudo-critic's humble opinion that *Talk Amongst*

The Trees, in its cryptic, gut-wrenching beauty, is a testimony to Cooper's sixth sense of understanding and expressing the details of the soul with a language all his own. (BM)

Temporary Residence Limited, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206, www.temporaryresidence.com

Enablers, The – To Thine Own Ruin Be True, CD

Opener "Tomorrow" sets the bar high for the rest of this album; it's hooky, guitar-driven rootsy rock, reminiscent of The Replacements. The guitar in the song's verse is innately catchy, and it will be stuck in your head for days. This style of music, though, treads a thin line, because it can easily become radio-friendly pap with its earnest everyman vibe. Whereas "Tomorrow" had a relatively fast tempo to keep it edge, other songs are more midtempo rock numbers. Songs like "Break Your Heart" can sound a bit cheesy, though a tougher song like "High And Outside" balances it. The Enablers are probably an overlap band; indie kids and root rockers can enjoy them alongside your average Black Crowes fan. Guitar solos and pop hooks aside, *Ruin* is a strong record. (KR)

Mars Motors, 1608 W. Mountain Ave., Fort Collins, CO 80521, www.marsmotors.com

End Of A Year – Disappear Here, CD

Thanks for the handwritten note on legal paper rather than a photocopied press release—it made me feel really special. Of course, it won't guarantee you a good review. I did like the breakneck pace of this metallic, experimental band and how the songs hold it together when they sound like they could fall apart into disorder. The singer sort of reminds me of the singer for Nation Of Ulysses (pre-funk). (JJG)

OneOhFive, PO Box 19 Troy, NY 12182, www.oneohfive.com; Losing Face, PO Box 14641 Albany, NY 12212, www.losingfacerecords.com

Emok – Shove Your Head Into The Ground And Feed It To The Earth, CD

This record heavy, passionate, rock record is entirely unique. Originally from hailing from Israel, Emok incorporates Middle Eastern influences and rhythms throughout the record. They use a lot of distortion, even on the vocals, accompanied by electronic samples and interesting vocal harmonization. There are so many layers to this record. Fantastic. (EH)
Wrong, 378 Third Ave., New York, NY 10016, www.wrongrecords.net

Enon – Lost Marbles & Exploded Evidence, CD

A collection of hard-to-find tracks spanning seven-plus years, this is both a great introduction to and a great history of this strange, experimental, electronic pop band. A lot of interesting gems are included, the best being all of the early material (which tends to have more of a creative and weird element). (MG)

Touch & Go, POB 25520, Chicago, IL 60625, www.touchandgorecords.com

Estee Louder – Ohio's Best, CD

Albums with pictures of naked "chicks" and/or "boobies" on the cover tend to scream out the following: "LOOK AT ME! I'M A SHOCKING COVER, HERE TO

Reviewer Spotlight: Art Ettinger (AE)

Bored To Death, S/T. Recess Records is famous for releasing a lot of great bands, but this 7", my all-time favorite release on the label, remains virtually unknown. Originally released in 1993, it was repressed one time before becoming one of the first records to be discontinued by the label. It's a blistering, in-your-face, six-song EP by an obscure Arizona band fronted by Annie Rexic, one of the fiercest female vocalists I've yet heard. From her opening screams on the track "Hate You More," to her marginally more melodious tone on the EP's closing song, "My Own Plan," she comes off as brilliant, impassioned and angry as hell. The vocals and matter-of-fact lyrics gel to make this 7" one of the more mysterious classic records of the '90s. Nowadays this EP is somewhat difficult to find, so as a last resort, you can check out the band via the Recess compilations *Hot Curly Weenie* and *Play At Your Own Risk*, the latter of which includes the track "Vomit," which was unreleased at the time.

I'm way into these presently: *Limp Wrist, Thee Official Discography*; 26 (Doc Corbin Dart of The Crucifucks), *The Messiah*; Operation: Cliff Clavin, *Out Of Control: A Discography of the 1990s*; Negative Approach, *Ready To Fight: Demos, Live And Unreleased Tracks (1981-1983)*; A.P.A., *Lights Out*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Melissa Geils (MG)

Malaria!, Compiled 1981-1984. This fabulous disc compiles all of the classic tracks from this (primarily) German, all female post-punk/art-damaged/new-wave band. These five women (some of whom had previously played with such notable acts as Nina Hagen, Glen Branca and Die Haut) gained international underground notoriety after just a couple of indie singles, a Peel session and a US tour with The Birthday Party (playing at hot spots like NYC's Studio 54 and Danceteria). Their style was often minimal and kinetic, yet interspersed with funk, jazz, disco, avant synth/electronica and artful noise experimentation. You can hear their influences and how they affected the music of ESG, James Chance, Nina Hagen, Suicide, Bauhaus, Heaven 17 and OMD. To say the least, their influence on the underground art-punk scene of the early 1980s has largely been overlooked. One of their early singles, "Kaltes Klares Wasser," is a funky, gothy bass-and-synth driven art-punk piece that is exemplary of what was then deemed as "New German Music." Other notable tracks included on this collection include the dark and eerily repetitive "Your Turn To Run," the off-kilter new wave dance track "You You" (which is also one of their best known songs), and the experimental synth-punk tracks "Geld/Money" and "Macht/Power." This CD-only release is definitely worth tracking down.

Perfect jam: LCD Soundsystem, *S/T*; Optimo *How to Kill the DJ Pt. 2* comp; Tussle, *Kling Klang* (reviewed this issue); Out Hud, *Let Us Never Speak Of It Again* (reviewed this issue).



GRAB YOUR ATTENTION AND KEEP IT OFF THE MEDIOCRE MUSIC WITHIN!" This is no exception: very typical and dirty r'n'r/punk. Boring. (MG)
Diaphragm, POB 10388, Columbus, OH 43201, www.diaphragmrecords.com

☛ **Ethan Daniel Davidson Five – Free The Ethan Daniel Davidson Five, CD**

Their band name and album title give you a clear idea of the level of originality to their style. They sound like a decent band that plays weekly at the bar down the street, one that would otherwise be playing the Eagles or Credence Clearwater Revival on the jukebox. You hear 12-string guitars and a Hammond B-3 organ, pedal steel and some swooning backing vocals for some truly soulful Nashville rock and twang (and some country-ish ballads). "I need you like a house on fire," "I can't drink you pretty" and "Semi-literate cowboy poem" indicate the nature of the semi-clever and thoughtful lyrics. The words sometimes help the basic '80s-country-rock sound, though some periods should not be revisited. If that is an era you like, then don't miss this. (BA)
Times Beach, www.timesbeachrecords.com

☛ **Eufio – Humoresque, CD**

This all-lady trio fucking rips! Straight-up r'n'r/pop punk that is catchy, fun, sarcastic, sassy and smart. I guess this would lie in that whole "post-riot grrrr!" genre (?). Although I hate all of that "post-this" "post-that" bullshit, I seriously feel like I'm back in the 1990s listening to this—and that's not a bad thing. Eufio are definitely like a modern day Heavens To Betsy meets Bratmobile, but with a cleaner, fresher sound and a whole lot of energy. Their songs go from simple pop-punk gems to more experimental, minimalist tracks. But the common thread that links the whole album is the witty and whip-smart political and social commentary of the lyrics (something that I genuinely miss in today's punk rock). Songs like "Early-'90s Nostalgia" and "Community Chest" really kick things into gear and show that punk and politics not only go together, but also can be fun. Punk-rock feminism at its best. (MG)
Self-released, www.eufio.com

☛ **Exmortem – Nihilistic Contentment, CD**

Technical death metal without being too flashy, these Europeans have crafted a brutal record. With heavy production that doesn't sound overly Pro-Tooled, *Nihilistic Contentment* lands all punches to the torso, slipping a shot below the belt every once in awhile for good measure. A solid death-metal record all around. (DH)
Wicked World/Earache, 2nd Floor, W. 38th St., New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

☛ **Failures' Union, The – You Know Who, CDEP**

In a band photo, one member wears a Rites Of Spring shirt, so that gave me high hopes. Unfortunately this sounds nothing like that. It takes three M's to describe this: midtempo, melodic and mellow. The closest comparison I can come up with is later Compound Red crossed with early Buffalo Tom. (DA)
Art Of The Underground, 3234 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214, www.artoftheunderground.com

☛ **Fake Problems – Oh No!, CD**

When did "electronica" become synonymous with generic sounding emo? *Fake Problems* is just one of the many soft-to-loud, post-whatever bands that is undoubtedly filling up this issue. When will these nerds learn to keep this pap strictly to the campus open mic nights and weblogs? Sheesh! (MS)
For Documentation Only, PMB 38, PO Box 413005, Naples, FL 34101-3005, www.fordocumentationonly.com

☛ **Reviewer Spotlight: Tara Goe (TG)**

The Gossip, S/T EP. "This one goes out to all the kids who grew up in a shitty small town." The minute I heard Beth Ditto's voice, I knew everything would be all right. Although this EP is only around six minutes long, it sticks in my mind as being longer and bigger, simply because I heard it around the first time I saw the Gossip play live. The experience was, like Ditto's gospel cries and holy-roller shimmying, a total revelation. Having grown up in my own small hick town, I never realized how much I needed to be saved until I heard that voice. Then I realized that yes, myself and all the other kids were going to be OK, we'd make it out. The band has arguably gotten better over the years, but there's something about this first EP that really moves me. It reminds me of the first time you fall in love with music, dancing and the idea of creating your own community. Ditto's voice is the voice on the stereo of every adolescent's secret bedroom dance party; it's the voice that tells you, "Come hell or high water, you'll find a home for yourself, even if you no longer have a hometown."

On the prowl: The Monks, *Black Monk Time*; ESG, *A South Bronx Story*; M83, *Dead Cities*; Red Seas & Lost Ghosts; Deerhoof, *Reveille*; Sufjan Stevens, *Greetings From Michigan*.

☛ **Fangs – Watch What You Say To Ghosts, CD**

If this were a food, it'd be lasagna or spanakopita, something with many layers, some rich and others light and flaky. They pile on classical piano, thumpadelic drums and restrained but spirited guitars that ride the wave with aplomb. Too bad the yelpy vocals often grate. (DAL)
Lujo, 3209 Jennie Drive, Morgan City, LA 70380, www.lujorecords.com

☛ **Fehlmann, Thomas – Lowflow, CD**

An occasional member of The Orb produces some dubby electronic minimalism, reminiscent of Pan American. The production is crisp, and the deep beats are sound. The mellow atmosphere of the pieces allows more space for glitchy touches. (BA)
Plug Research, 4519 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.plugresearch.com

☛ **Ferraro, Mike – S/T, CDEP**

Mike Ferraro sings vaguely sad songs with a strummed acoustic guitar, a litany of la-la-la's and a voice that carries little more than a head cold. This is quintessential coffee-shop music to finish your homework to. (TS)
Self-released, www.mikeferraro.net

☛ **Feverfew, The – Apparitions, CD**

With an overwhelming pile of awful singer-songwriters out there, this is a breath of fresh air. The Feverfew is Bethany Spiers with a few others pitching in. Her voice reminds me a lot of Mirah. After reading the lyrics, I'm not surprised that she was a creative writing major in college. Top notch. Musically it's melodic and gentle, the perfect thing to play while staring out the window on a dark and rainy Saturday afternoon. It's rare that a release comes to me anonymously and completely blows me away, but *Apparitions* achieves that. (DA)
Eyeball, PO Box 179, Kearny, NJ 07032 www.eyeballrecords.com

☛ **Fifty-Four Square Foot Trampoline – That Simple, CD**

Many lyrics on this strong, engagingly atmospheric record address someone, but the moody, less-is-more music creates an overwhelming sense of isolation. Chilly electronic effects, slow tempos, minor chords and prominently mixed vocals surround the band like a funhouse of mirrors. All the band sees are itself and its emotions. (JM)
Hill Billy Stew, PO Box 82625, San Diego, CA 92138, www.hillbillystew.com

☛ **Fireballs Of Freedom – Greasy Retrospective, CD**

Make sure you're wearing all flame-retardant materials when juicing this up. Fireballs Of Freedom are a potent form of lighter fluid and kindling that could start a raging forest fire with the right dry conditions. Old-time organs, Mooney Suzuki abandon and all-out heat-waving make them as awesomely garage as they come. (SM)
Wantage USA, PO Box 8681, Missoula, MT 59807, www.wantageusa.com

☛ **Five Minute Ride – The World Needs Convincing Of All That It's Missing, CDEP**

Five Minute Ride does the by-the-book sleeper emocore routine with well-practiced precision, but who wants to hear another audio done? Their press kit implores "listen to their message and feel their pain." Despite the partially interesting guitar harmonization, I'm not feeling much of anything. (BM)
Rise, PO Box 135, Roseburg, OR 97470, www.riserecords.com

☛ **Flaming Stars, The – Named And Shamed, CD**

Why is this on Alternative Tentacles? It's '80s pop with an aggressive moment or two. John Peel raved about them and recorded them many times over the last few years of his life. Shoegazer music for those who still dig

their Psychedelic Furs records. (EA)

Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092 San Francisco, CA 94141-9092, www.alternativetentacles.com

☛ **Fluid Ounces – The Whole Shebang, CD**

This is an unremarkable album of piano-centered pop music. Despite repeated listens, the songs failed to interest me in any way, though they did make me wish that Ben Folds Five were still together. This is no substitute. (MP)

Vacant Cage, 1784 W. Northfield Blvd. #415, Murfreesboro, TN 37129, www.vacantcagerecords.com

☛ **Foetus – (Not Adam), CDEP**

Foetus returns with a new single that's a driving mix of synth orchestration and electronic tomfoolery. It's composed of two remixes from the forthcoming *Love* and one non-album track, the calypso-esque "Not In Yr Hands." It's certainly not essential, as most guest remixes tend to be. (MS)
Birdman, PO Box 50777 Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.birdmanrecords.com

☛ **Forward To Death – Death Therapy, CD**

Forward To Death sounds exactly as you would expect: a cross between the Dead Kennedys and Black Flag, with a little speed-core. Hardcore is definitely not the popular genre of the moment, though if you want a contemporary band doing it right, Forward To Death is your ticket. (EA)
Perfect Victim, PO Box 5232 Huntington Beach, CA 92615, www.perfectvictim.com

☛ **Four Volts – Triple Your Workforce, CD**

Upon listening to this debut, I would've immediately guessed this band was British. They borrow and steal so well from the genres the Brits perfected, especially Britpop and New Wave—but they're from Long Island, and that makes them even more fantastic. The first two songs, "Didn't You Used To Be Invisible?" and "Heartworm," offer a one-two punch to suck you into the record. The band keeps the enthralling assault going for a dozen tracks with zero missteps. Track seven, "Rearrange Me," may be one of the best pop songs of 2005. In Four Volts, it seems America has found their response to the death of the Libertines. Trust me, one listen is all you need to be addicted to these sublime pop-punk songs. (MP)
Kanine, PO Box 404, Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012, www.kaninerecords.com

☛ **Frames, The – Burn The Maps, CD**

One of the biggest bands in Ireland, The Frames sound like Coldplay to the rest of the world on *Burn The Maps*. But don't let that reference point stop you from listening, as *Burn The Maps* has the grand intensity of a band that believes it should be on top of the world. Singer Glen Hansard is sinister one moment and a folk balladeer the next, lending a sense of tension to every song. The Frames have been at it for more than a decade, and this album sees them marrying a more aggressive guitar sound with the lighter turf the act explored on 2001's *For The Birds*. It makes for an album of surprises, where a fiddle lurks around the corner of every arena anthem. (TM)

Anti-, 2798 Sunset Blvd, L.A., CA 90026, www.anti.com

☛ **Francis, Sage – A Healthy Distrust, CD**

Holy shit, this rules. Sage Francis kicks out complicated rhymes and lacerating lyrics to create a completely unique type of hip-hop. Opener "The Buzz Kill" is brimming with a barely controlled angst that any punk rocker will identify with. This is excellently layered, nearly flawlessly executed hip hop that should thrust Francis into the limelight. (KR)
Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Frankenstein – An Ugly Display Of Self-Preservation, CD

Frankenstein play horror punk, and while it may be a genre that's been done to death (no pun intended), they do a pretty damn good job of it. Songs cover the usual ground of women, cars, getting fucked up and of course gore. (SJ)

Fiendforce, Blumenthalstrasse 31, 50670 Köln, Germany, www.fiendforce.de

Frankl Project, The – Cost Of War, CDEP

Around 1998, the Frankl Project would have fit in on Drive-Thru Records, joining Mothermania and the Pharmaceutical Bandits as eaters at the pop-punk/ska trough. *Cost Of War* is late-'90s redux without innovation or horns that tries on a System Of A Down vocal attack as its selling point. (SM)

Self-released, www.tfp.moonfruit.com

Franklin Delano – Like A Smoking Gun In Front of Me, CD

This is awesome. Like opening the window on an autumn day and listening to the breeze blow leaves in cyclones across the backyard, push past the empty rope swing and brush through the curtains. Like sitting at the kitchen table, starting into a cup of tea, thumbing through faded pictures of the past and trying to focus on the obfuscated image of what's to come. Piano, guitar and other strings mix together, occasionally pulling back to reveal percussions that transform from rolling, roaming beats to something akin to drops of liquid plopping into a cool tin basin. Mellow, spacey and home felt, but still falling back into something darker and mysterious, a corner where you don't go for fear of a lurking presence. Call it "post-folk" or any other genre-stifling label; either way it's just plain beautiful. (AA)

File 13, PO Box 804868, Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

Freak Accident, The – S/T, CD

There is a wide array of styles on the Freak Accident's self-titled record. Some tracks have a Flut/Sugar influence; others a hard rock/Booker T. Jones organ sound. Unfortunately, few are effective, due to uninteresting songwriting. (RL)

Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.alternativetentacles.com

Free Verse – Generator, CD

Free Verse is like a harder, less melodic version of L7 or Babes In Toyland, but the music remains discordant alternative rock-sounding. I must say I loved the actual guitars, bass and drums on this record, but they lost me with the crazy shouted vocals—only Kat Bjelland can pull that off. (KM)

Buttermilk, attn: Brian Steel, 1108 13th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122, www.buttermilkrecords.com

Friends Forever / Gang Wizard – split, CD

Unless I were a sophomore at a rich white high school, I couldn't see myself in Friends Forever's faux-basement-noise "space viking" song cycle. Gang Wizard, on the other hand, has the sense to lose all self-control early and sustain that mania like an angrier Harry Pussy. It is my mirror. (TS)

Deathbomb Arc, www.deathbombarc.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Jason Gooder (JJG)

The Clash, Combat Rock. The album starts off with Joe Strummer shouting "This is a public service announcement, with guitars!" Then "Know Your Rights" starts, a song about government control as relevant as ever. The razor sharp guitar chords still raise the hair on the back of my neck. This was the Clash's big pop crossover album, with both "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?" and "Rock The Casbah" being hits in the US. Although I usually skip these songs now that I see "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?" on a TV commercial, there are enough good nuggets on this album to recommend it. The production is more multi-dimensional than The Clash's earlier work, and the band took a lot of risks with this album: songs blending ska, funk and sweeping soundscapes with harmonica and spoken word. Joe Strummer's lyrics are intelligent and worthy of poring over to try to understand what he is saying; unlike most rock 'n' roll, nothing is simple and obvious. This album has a certain nostalgic value for me (probably like many others), as it was the first time I heard punk rock. Purists could argue whether or not it truly is a punk rock album because of the genre-bending sound and pop hits, but songs like "Know Your Rights" woke me up to a new type of rock 'n' roll that was critical, angry, and smart.

What I'm Listening To: The Coachwhips, Peanut Butter And Jelly Live At The Ginger Minge (reviewed this issue); Satan's Pilgrims, Plymouth Rock (reviewed this issue); Guitar Wolf, RRE (reviewed this issue); Tom Waits, Real Gone; the Clash, Combat Rock.

Reviewer Spotlight: Emily Hausman (EH)

Barkmarket, L. Ron. L. Ron is heavy as hell. A record that's name is a play on L Ron Hubbard's (founder of scientology) name would have to be, right? This is a rock record for bad asses only. I've heard Barkmarket called NY art grunge; I would call it maverick rock. This record is heavy and really brutal without screaming and repetitive metal riffs, imagine that. The thunder never quits from start to finish and it's a pummeling you'll want to take over and over again. There is nothing light about this record even the lyrics. The guitar provides a wall of noise over a really tight rhythm section. This record is heavy but has a lot of soul. It is delightfully pissed. If you don't know who their singer/guitar player D. Sardy is, look him up. For fans of The Jesus Lizard, Shellac and Tomahawk you feel right at home but surprisingly refreshed and excited. If you haven't already become a fan of this record you need to be immediately.

Cool as Ice: Pelican, Australasia; Sharks Keep Moving, S/T; Smoking Popes, Destination Failure; Slint, Spiderland; Low, Trust.

Front, The – Let's Go Bongo Fury, CD

This retrospective ('80-'84) pays homage to guitarist Randy Rush, who recently passed away. The 19 live and studio tracks sound like they could have been Florida's version of the Talking Heads or Devo, but with a harder edge. This is for the synth nerd in some of us. (DM)

Whatever Way Productions, www.whateverwayproductions.com

Frontside Five – No Pegs, CD

I love skate rock as much as the next guy, but as tight as these kids are, they just sound goofy. Maybe it's because I wrote songs about road rash and the apocalypse like this when I was 12. But if you need Skate Rock 101 and read Thrasher, then start here. (DM)

Frontside Five, PO Box 9002 Denver, CO 80209, www.frontsidefive.net

Fuck The Forest – S/T, CD

This Davis, Calif., foursome play tortured and dramatic emo like early Milemarker. The screamed dual vocals intertwine with a dual guitar assault. When they decide not to be angry anymore, they play an intricate instrumental. It's superbly written and solidly played, but hard to distinguish from countless late '90s emo bands. (VC)

Tim Davis, PO Box 4534, Davis, CA 95617, timdavisrecords@yahoo.com

Fuck You Ups – Black And Black And Black, CD

The tear sheet accompanying this disc says, "We're old—way too old to have such a retarded name." I love 'em already. This is punk rock played by a bunch of friends who keep putting out mediocre records and use their band as an excuse to drink. I am only guessing. (EA)

Formula 13, PO Box 7385, Tempe, AZ 85281-0013, www.formula13.com

Funeral Dress – Come On Follow, CD

Street-punk professionals Funeral Dress throw together 11 originals along with an unnecessary cover of Slade's "Cum On Feel The Noise." Essential? No. Great, clean production? Yes. Should you pick this up? Yes, if you like your punk with fists in the air. (EA)

SOS, PO Box 3017, Corona, CA 92878-3017, www.sosrecords.us

Funeral Dress – Party Political Bullshit, CD

I love street-punk for its irony. These jokers use ambiguous, empty slogans aimed at denouncing a government that uses slightly more clever, ambiguous, empty slogans. There is absolutely no substance to this record at all. Musically, it's all power chords, root-note bass and the same drum beat—the epitome of redundancy. (RL)

SOS, PO Box 3017, Corona, CA 92878-3017, www.sosrecords.us

Fury Of A Thousand Zeuses – Habanero Enema, 7"

Extremely rough, goofy and fast garage punk. Songs about drinking, the futility/comedy of life and of course, habanero enemas. Nothing too complicated, but fun, raucous stuff. They also do a Dead Milkmen cover, and my copy came with a Superhero trading card. (NS)

Self-released, 2407 N. Pierce St., Milwaukee, WI 53212

G-Spot – Come Here Go Away, CD

You're angry, you're good-looking, and men can't have you! Bang! Whoa! Girl power! The simplicity of the message on *Come Here Go Away*, while not all that simple, is annoying in its one-dimensional credo. G-Spot's melodies are likewise over-the-top and the vocals contrived—mainstream feminism run rampant. (AJA)

Revolutionary / self-released, www.gspotband.com

Garrison / Orange Island – split, CDEP

This EP features one original song from each band and one cover of the other's song. Garrison is a little poppier, but with elements of Quick-sand's groove. Orange Island plays melodic hardcore that's a little harder and faster. Both bands are catchy and have interesting guitar work into their songs. Not bad. (NS)

Lonesome, PO Box 15297, Boston, MA 02215, www.lonesomerecordings.com

Get Loose – Demo #1, CD

Quirky, jangled indie rock that doesn't really go anywhere. Vocals alternate between screaming, speaking, and singing. Give these guys some time. (SJM)

ECA, 35 Wright Street, Weymouth, MA 02190, www.ecarecords.com

Get Out – The Cutting Edge, CD

I must admit I'm not very familiar with oi, but I imagine these Dutch guys don't play it much different from the other legions of oi bands out there. Tough-sounding vocals backed by surprisingly melodic guitar and basslines describe this one. (KM)

Rebellion, www.rebellionrecords.nl

Ghengis Tron – Cloak Of Love, CDEP

Blender metaphors are about the worst you can do in a record-review section, but I think this CD might literally be the master tapes for two different bands thrown in a blender. Several times within one track the music completely reverses from harsh blast-beat grind into somber, soaring electropop and back. Wacky. (RR)

Crucial Blast, PO Box 364, Hagerstown, MD 21741, www.crucialblast.net

Ghost Town Deputies – Don't Mind If I Don't, CD

This impressive 14-track record could earn the Deputies promotions to boomtown sheriffs. Ian Trumbull's songs employ familiar alt-country themes such as blue collars, open roads and alcohol, but Trumbull isn't lazy. When complete, the occasionally restrained country-rock songs—with traces of The Replacements and Mike Ness—are authentic and affecting. (JM)

Hello Lampshade / self-released, www.ghosttowndeputies.com

Gibbons, The – Hope, Inc., CD

This is excellent contemporary pop punk, aggressive, catchy and tight. The lyrics lean toward the political, but go way beyond mere sloganeering to something much more intelligent and personal. Great throaty vocals à la Jawbreaker or Leatherface; fans of those bands should check out this Detroit trio. (JC)

Salinas, PO Box 20996, Ferndale MI 48220, www.unshadowed.com/salinas

**Githead – Headgit, CDEP**

When an old punk teams with a member of the experimental electronic underground, there is reason to doubt, especially since Colin Newman's synth-leaning work in Wire led to uneven results. Yet this five-song EP, which pairs Newman with Robin Rimbaud (AKA, Scanner), is a joy to listen to, a nearly seamless mix of synths and guitars that echoes everything from Stereolab ("Reset") to PIL ("Craft Is Dead"). The lyrics hit on the requisite surrealism for an art-rock trio (a sampling: "destabilized, apologetic, sublime cordial, synthetic"), but they're sung in such a hushed manner that they lend a warmth to the music. The rhythm-heavy songs are built around new-wave bass lines, and "Profile" is certainly the highlight here—a pre-industrial rock 'n' roll dance party that falls prey to a triumphant guitar riff at midpoint. A full-length is due this summer. (TM)

Swim, PO Box 3459 London SW19 6ES, UK, www.swimhq.com

Glory Of This—Adoration CD

Screamo at its most typical: screaming and singing accompanied by metallic hardcore topped with cheesy lyrics about failed relationships. There really isn't any variation in the songs. It's not sloppy, and the arrangements are sometimes a little interesting, but this record is just average. (EH)

Indianola, 649 S. Henderson Road, Apt. B106, King Of Prussia, PA 19406, www.indianolarecords.com

Go Like Hell – Hell Bent Rock N Roll, CD

It's hard to get past the first song biting "Dirty Deeds Done Dirty Cheap" so hard. Still, it's decent music for a semi-generic "woo, rawk!" kinda band. This is slightly more saturated AC/DC guitars and strong female punker vocals credibly delivering meat-'n'-potatoes meathead rock. (RR)

Buttermilk, 1108 13th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122, www.buttermilkrecords.com

Gore Gore Girls – 7 X 4, CDEP

Gore Gore Girls go under the hood in a Detroit garage and soup up the girl-group genre with raw power. The Girls electrify some bubblegum tunes, but their revved-up R&B riffs rock most. Recorded by garage guru Jim Diamond, this fine seven-track EP previews three songs on a forthcoming LP. (JM)

Self-released, www.goregoregirls.com

Grayskul – Deadlivers, CD

This dark hip hop delivers for the most part, and although some of the beats seem almost incomplete, this record works just fine. MCs Reason and Re-cluse spit some paranoid-sounding shit and keep it tight. Nice guests from the always great Mr. Lif as well as Aesop Rock and Canibus. (DH)

Rhymesayers, www.rhymesayers.com

Greenlawn Abbey – S/T, CD

Grungy pop rock, just raw enough to not be completely wimpy. The problem is, with the absence of any big riffs, the tunes live and die by the dramatic effect of the chord progressions. With the exception of "Ladyluck," the songs just don't harness enough emotional power to be as heartbreaking as they wanna be. (AJ)

Diaphragm, PO Box 10388, Columbus, OH 43201, www.diaphragmrecords.com

Gryleleoth – Spinning A Vibration, CD

Spinning A Vibration is an unassuming and surprisingly strong record. Musically, the album contains a lot of Minutemen, Wipers and Mission Of Burma influence. Lyrically, the band uses the same social commentary/

criticism as Watt and Boon, but Gryleleoth are not nearly as effective. That's partially due to their somewhat ambiguous examples (clichés, not terribly pertinent oppression, etc.). (RL)

Terraphile Records, no contact information given

Guilford – Weak, CDEP

I don't know about this one. The first two songs are languid, post-rock tracks that draw you in, but the last two tracks are bad. They seem melodramatic and forced, making them hard to listen to. I have to pass. (MP)

Self-released, www.guilfordmusic.com

A Gun Called Tension – S/T, CD

This creative mix of hip-hop and new-wave elements surprises with other genres and instruments throughout this eclectic concoction. On "Document," a warped rap chants within charges of Bauhaus guitars. "Electric Chair" is superbly mellow, showcasing fine voices. At points, you can't help but move. (BA)

Cold Crush, PO Box 348, Hollywood, CA 90078, www.coldcrushrecords.com

Haggard, The / Dominatrix – split, 7"

Two of the most prominent names in queer-core team up. Dominatrix's contributions are punchy, tight indie rock in the vein of Sleater-Kinney, while Mr. Lady's the Haggard offers a much gruffer attack. The latter's intensity cools down a bit prematurely, though, as their side quickly meanders into bland. (MS)

Vida Loca, www.vidalocarecords.com

Hand To Hand – A Perfect Way To Say Goodbye, CD

An average mix of screamo and new radio emo-pop. This album has a good sound to the recording, but I just can't listen to it without thinking about Carson Daly and cringing. (TK)

Lifeforce, PO Box 680, Conshohocken, PA 19428, www.lifeforcerecords.com

Hatestick – Applesed LP, CD

This is mellow, light, spacey ambient rock music with awkward lyrics. The music is not complex, and song structure is predictable and remedial at best. Cheesy, cliché, not good. (EH)

Darthill, PO Box 2013, Hartford, CT 06144, www.darthillrecords.com

Heartless Bastards – Stairs And Elevators, CD

Singer Erika Wennerstrom is the centerpiece of Heartless Bastards. Her strong, unique voice drives their soulful, punk-influenced melodies, which are catchy, sincere and to the point. Most of their songs can be turned into fun sing-alongs, but the standout track is the slower, low-key "Runnin'." Wennerstrom's beautiful, bluesy voice gives the song an authentic tone, one that is "felt," no matter how contrived that sounds. This is one of the best debuts I've heard in a while, one that I've liked right off the bat. *Stairs And Elevators* is good, solid rock with memorable melodies and unforgettable vocals. (AJA)

Fat Possum, PO Box 1923, Oxford, MS 38655, www.fatpossum.com

Heart Of Heroes – S/T, CDEP

Here we have some really good melodic punk with lots of rocking elements. The heavy riffage reminds me of Quicksand at times. As the CD progresses, they move more into modern indie-rock territory. It's a little too clean for my taste, but not without its charm. (DA)

Self-released, 34079 Mariposa St., Yucaipa, CA 92399 www.heartsofheroes.net

Hellstomper – Fine . . . Forget It, CD

The first studio album in four years from this popular Confederacy Of Scum band is sadly their last. It's a good, rugged, country-punk album,

which fans will want to check out. Newcomers should check out all of the recent Hellstomper reissues as well. (AE)

Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

High Priest – Book Of Keys Single, 12" single

High Priest's gritty, Eastern Seaboard hip hop runs deep with innovation and sincerity. Digital currents and near-dub effects mesh with industrial-strength bulldozer beats, resulting in a short, but impressive single. The smell and taste of sweaty city streets is imbedded in these vinyl grooves. (BM)

Soundink, 95 Wyckoff St. #3A, Brooklyn, NY 11201, www.soundink.com

Hightower – S/T, CD

I get the feeling these dudes are, as the English say, "taking the piss." It's tongue-in-cheek, somewhat sloppily played power metal. I grew up on thrash metal (never heard much "punk rock" till my early 20s), so it bugs me when people don't give the genre the artistic credibility it deserves. (AJ)

Man Baby, 2830 Harrison St., San Francisco, CA 94110, manbabyrecords@yahoo.com

Holy Ghost, The – Welcome To Ignore Us, CD

Incoming! Take cover it's a hipster eruption! Aarrghhh!! If you managed to duck the flying flaming chunks of spoken word pretension, vaguely ironic hard rock sleaze, fake jazz, fragments of French and shards of Brooklyn attitude, you may actually find this to be pretty danceable and fairly listenable. (DAL)

Clearly, 195 Stanton St. #462, New York, NY 10002, www.clearlyrecords.com

Holy Mountain, The – Bloodstains Across Your Face In Decline, CD

Sixteen tracks of intense hardcore with all of the general requirements (screaming, discordance, driven melodies) present in abundance. The cover of the abrasive Crass single "Big Hands" goes right in hand with their original contributions. Seek this one out. (BN)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604 www.noidearecords.com

Hood – Outside Closer, CD

The latest from these veteran Britpop experimentalists is a fine place to start. The album opens with an explosion of harmony and digital sounds, and what follows is a collection of acoustic-based songs dressed in electronics, violins and all sorts of ambient noise. Yet Hood excels at turning odd tangents into hooks. (TM)

Domino, PO Box 47029 London SW18 1WD, UK, www.dominorecordco.com

Hotpipes – The Deadly Poison, CD

Back in my college days, this is what we used to call "college rock." It's not edgy enough to be punk, not fucked up enough to be post-punk, not catchy enough to be power pop, not dancey enough to be new wave and not compelling enough to listen to twice. (JC)

Vacant Cage, 1748 W Northfield Blvd. #215, Murfreesboro, TN 37129, www.vacantcagerecords.com

Human Host – Invisible Arteries, CD

This science-fiction-flavored B-movie soundtrack material summons the shrieks of malfunctioning machinery and echoes the angst of tortured carnival workers crying out into the void. Then they decide they want to play "normal" songs. Well, kind of. It grows on you, morphing from bizarre to sad. (DAL)

MT6, 3024 Fifth Ave., Baltimore, MD 21234, www.newagehillbilly.com

I Object / Forever Youth – split, 7"

Punks Before Profits keeps serving up one ace after another: I haven't heard a bad release from them yet. The label is run by two members of I Object,

Reviewer Spotlight: Dave Hofer (DH)

Snapcase, *Progression Through Unlearning*. Victory Records has released some awesome albums. There, I said it. This happens to be one of them. Released in my formative musical years, this record helped teach me that you could be heavy as fuck and not be a metal band. Sure, there are metal leanings on *Progression*, but for the most part, it's a midtempo romp through Riff City. Every one of its 10 songs has something that I can still hear and shake my head, thinking, "Goddamn that's a good fucking riff." Aside from the blatant heaviness factor, there's a certain catchiness to this record that is undeniable. Not so much a melodic "I can sing along with that" catchiness as one that just leaves rhythms stuck in your head. As each song ends, one can't help but wonder what greatness the next will bring, and until the album closes with a sample from Pee-Wee's Big Adventure, you're kept waiting for that final, destructive riff that will send you through the floor—much like the end of a kung-fu movie, where the final villain is disposed of with an unprecedented move that makes the audience both cringe and clap with delight. *Progression* is a sure-fire winner in the Best Driving Music category as well.

I run and fall while the world keeps on running: Big L, *Lifestyles Of Da Poor And Dangerous*; The Qunitet, *Jazz At Massey Hall*; Angel Corpse: *Hammer Of Gods*; J-Live, *All Of The Above*; Shitcum, *Fucked In Half*.

who play fast female-fronted hardcore. The production on their side could use a little work, but you can still tell they have great songs. If they're playing in your town, make sure you check them out because not only do they rule live, they're also cool people. The Forever Youth side is fast, thrashy hardcore with gravelly vocals. They play five short songs just the way I like it: straight to the point. As with the I Object side, Forever Youth has well written lyrics. It's on turquoise vinyl for all you collector geeks. (DA)
Punks Before Profits, 537 Caroline St., Rochester, NY 14620 www.punksbeforeprofits.com

Ida - Heart Like A River, CD

Pop music, like many other forms of art or rare human action, is often marked by the decadence of making something so elegant and refined seem simple or easy. After more than 10 years of existence, Ida's ability to create works of stunning power and emotion from minimalist melody and instrumentation grows ever stronger. *Heart Like A River* praises the musical past and penetrates the uncharted future. It's imprinted with the bona fide heaves and releases of love and interaction, intertwined with magnetized harmony. Starry eyed and melancholic, this is an album of exceptional treasure. (BM)

Polyvinyl, PO Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826, www.polyvinylrecords.com

If Man Is Five - Blood Is The Ink Hate Is The Story, CD

First of all, this has some of the worst artwork I have ever seen. Other than that and the fact that they took their name from a Pixies song, there's something buried deep within this album. Maybe it's just my complete hate for bands like Evanescence that use a female to try and sneak a half-assed "metal" band into the mainstream, but If Man Is Five should really keep it up. The production is shoddy, and the vocals are unevenly mixed, but the music has a certain punky feel to it that's really catchy at points. For example, the song "Escape" has a cool riff that kicks in at 2:15. Had they slowed that riff down to half time, it would have been the heaviest thing I'd heard all day. Unfortunately, they don't, and the end result is the flipside of the songwriting coin that reveals their immature tendencies. If Man Is Five are endearing in the same way that you really want your younger sibling's band to succeed past shitty bar gigs. It's not really that great overall, but with time, better recordings and honing of chops, these ladies (and guy) could have something. (DH)
Self-released, www.blackazul.com/ifmanisfive.html

Impossible Shapes, The - Horus, CD

There is a certain Easy Listening, tropical island muzak quality here that is pleasantly polluted with some stray discordant notes and a couple of random burners. (DAL)

Secretly Canadian, 1499 W. Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

In The Face Of War, Live Forever Or Die Trying, CD

ITFOW blend screamy, metal/hardcore and punk with metal riffs and an abundance of breakdowns. They have two screamers, and once in awhile

they'll sing or have a group sing-along. They've included a bad hardcore cover of the Foo Fighters' "Everlong." All the songs sound similar; we've heard this stuff before. (EH)

Init Records, PO Box 871 Sioux Falls, SD 57101, www.initrecords.com

Information, The - Mistakes We Knew We Were Making, CD

This six-piece play some serious post-wave punk rock that is completely shaking up the Boston scene. Initially compared to Interpol, they created their own unique identity: synth-heavy punk rock reminiscent of the '80s, but contemporary-sounding. The sense of urgency and passion can almost be hidden behind angry, morose feelings in these songs, but the great musicianship can't be obscured. The guitars are loud, the rhythm section is pounding, and the keys complement the music instead of taking away from it. The sounds are either in your face or atmospheric, and they are balanced by vocals that are subtle but never hidden. The final product is a machine that is worth checking out. It's a bit early to say, but this will most likely be one of my favorite records of 2005. You won't regret it getting this one. (DM)

Primary Voltage, PO Box 382221 Cambridge, MA 02238, www.primaryvoltage.com

International Playboys, The - Sexiful, CD

Hide your daughters. Preoccupied with sex and rock 'n' roll, The International Playboys make irresponsibly entertaining music that once outraged parents. Veins probably protrude from the frontman's forehead when he howls. The drummer attacks his kit like Animal the Muppet. The guitar players pump out sludgy garage- and classic-rock riffs. (JM)

Motron / self-released, PO Box 8951, Missoula, MT 59807, www.theinternationalplayboys.com

Introducers - Close Ups, 12"

A lo-fi foray into surf rock with a touch of western thrown in for good measure. This band has potential, but needs to tighten up and cut the fat on the majority of their songs. (SJM)

Slovenly, PO Box 204, Reno, NV 89504, www.slovenly.com

Island View Drive - What Will It Take, CD

Slow breakdowns, quick moves from fast to slow, drawn-out syllables and strained vocals, *What Will It Take* is straight-up textbook emo. Some reggae influences are apparent, but the band does nothing with them; they play a standard reggae beat that comes across cheesy. Their melodies are stale and unfocused and their rhythms predictable. (AJA)

Acutest Records, acutestrecords.com

Jerome's Dream - Completed 1997-2001, 2xCD

Given the title, this is a two-disc compiling all of the material of one-step-ahead noise, or currently, screamo, band Jerome's Dream. However, they sound more like a noise band taking apart hardcore constructions, like Forstellia Ford or Reversal Of Man. Enjoyable are the cacophonous vocals that turn into toon-like, melting walls. (AJA)

Alone, PO Box 3019, Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Jesu - S/T, CD

Justin Broadrick's new project falls somewhere between Godflesh and new-age music, as this eight-song, many minute epic failed to impress me. Slow and boring, it appears Justin has fallen ill with Mike Patton Syndrome, where anything you release sells well because you were involved with other, better projects. (DH)

Hydra Head, PO Box 291430, Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.hydrahead.com

Jurado, Damien - On My Way To Absence, CD

On his new album, Damien Jurado employs the sparse, stripped down folk sound that has worked well for him in the past. On these songs about loss and longing, there's a certain sadness that Jurado invokes so well in his voice, making the music more convincing. This album is lovely. (MP)
Secretly Canadian, 1499 W. 2nd St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

Kerb - 3 Chords And The Truth?, CD

Wow, a surprisingly great pop punk album from these Aussies—pop punk updated for 2005, catchy, with a harder edge. These guys have lots of cool dual guitar melodies somewhere along the lines of Iron Maiden mixed with the "classic" Fat Wreck style: lots of fast drumming, minus that generic rat-a-tat sound made popular by many skate punk bands in the '90s. Their vocals are powerful, with a slight Australian accent that helps set them apart from their US counterparts at least. They do the fast thing well, but there are some nice breakdowns and intricate interludes that show their versatility. It seems these guys are carrying the pop-punk torch in that area of the world, since Sommerset has decided to go more rock. A definite keeper. (NS)

Self-released, PO Box 1726, Subiaco, Western Australia, 6904, www.kerb.net.au

Kidcrash, The - New Ruins, CD

The Kidcrash serve up good, old-fashioned emo that's poppy, pretty and melodic. Emo is a generic category, but it's apparent The Kidcrash have drawn from emo's innovators to make a sound all their own. This creative and occasionally mathy record is overall refreshing and well done. (EH)
Lujo, 3209 Jennie Drive, Morgan City LA 70380, www.lujorecords.com

Kill Crush Destroy - The Weaker We Get, CD

Somewhere among screamo, punk and hardcore is where this band resides—though they're a little too catchy for screamo, a little too abrasive for punk and a little too talented for hardcore. The songs are fast and rockin', and despite the anguished vocals and negative lyrics, there are a lot of good melodies—not to mention tons of cool guitar parts, crushing drums and driving bass parts. Over the course of the 13 songs, they never let up on the energy. It's a constant barrage of somewhat melodic hardcore anger and fury. (NS)

Dark City, 624 Lorimer St., Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.darkcityrecords.org

Reviewer Spotlight: Ari Joffe (AJ)

Nailbomb, Point Blank. Back in 1994, Max Cavalera of Sepultura got together with his buddy Alex Newport of Fudge Tunnel to record this killer, one-off side project. Their bands had toured together in the early '90s, despite playing somewhat different styles of heavy rock music. Sepultura, a thrash-metal outfit from Brazil, was, at one time, top contender for Slayer's title as the kings of heavy metal. Fudge Tunnel was a heavy-duty grunge band out of the U.K., who released a few extraordinary (and tragically overlooked) albums before disbanding in the late '90s. On the Nailbomb project, the two musicians sought to expand their palettes by combining their respective genres and infusing this mongrel mix with hardcore and Ministry-inspired industrial metal. They shared songwriting, guitar, bass and sample programming duties, and they brought in a few guests like Max's brother, Igor (who played live drums on half the tracks), and guitarists Dino Cazares (Brujeria) and Andreas Kisser (Sepultura) to round out the sound. Aside from the actual music being a metalhead's wet dream, Point Blank is one of the most well-produced heavy rock albums you're gonna hear. Alex Newport had just finished producing Fudge Tunnel's *Creep Diets* and acting as a "guitar sound consultant" on Sepultura's *Chaos AD* when he began work on this project, and the dude was at the top of his game. The guitars are just from hell; the bass has that perfect punchy growl; and the drums—forget about it. Killer stuff. I just wish they'd made more albums.

Nonstop rock: Cursed, Two; Metallica, *Kill 'Em All*; Sepultura, *Arise*; Diamond Head, *Behold The Beginning*; 25 Suaves, *I Want It Load* (reviewed this issue).

Reviewer Spotlight: Scott Jones (SJ)

Medicine, The Buried Life. My friend summed up this album best: The guitar sometimes comes close to being unbearable, but never quite gets there—and he meant that in a good way. Such is the sonic beauty of this record, which is filled with some of the best guitar textures since My Bloody Valentine's classic *Loveless*. Opener "The Pink" starts out with a shrill guitar pattern that threatens to give you a headache, and just as you're about to turn off your stereo, the bass and drums come in, and it starts to make sense. The song closes by rushing faster and faster to a climactic finish that ends with spurts of noise guitar. "She Knows Everything" also ends in a cacophonous, descending guitar motif that begs to give you a migraine before bursting into the happy beat of "Something Goes Wrong." Come to think of it, every song here ends in noise. But it's not all chaos; underneath it all reside great, melodic songs featuring Beth Thompson's harmonious voice. The attractiveness of this record lies in the juxtaposition of beauty and noise, yin and yang, feminine and masculine, to the point of making this one of my favorite albums of all time.

Faves and Raves: Sonic Youth, *Sonic Nurse*; Bardo Pond, *On The Ellipse*; Pavement, *Slanted And Enchanted*; Luxe And Reduxe; Imperial Teen, *What's Not To Love*; The Raveonettes, *Chain Gang Of Love*.



🔪 **Kill The Man Who Questions – Industry Document: Singles, Live, Unreleased, CD**

It's refreshing to know that there are still a few bands out there unwilling to let real hardcore die, and these guys are definitely one of them. This is 28 thrashing tracks of kickass political hardcore taken from past 7" releases and live sets. No tough-guy junk here. Their sound reminds me of a more aggressive Black Flag and Born Against in their chaotic drumming and duel male/female vocals. It's a bit of a letdown to know that they have been broken up for a few years now. Then again, we still have Limpwrist and RAMBO. (TK)

Cheap Art, PO Box 2101, Philadelphia, PA 19103, www.cheap-art.com

🔪 **Kill Your Idols – From Companionship To Competition, CD**

I haven't seen or heard Kill Your Idols in five years, so it's nice to get an update. Most reviews I have read compare them to Negative Approach, which is the comparison given to most hardcore bands with raspy vocals. They remind me of more modern bands like Paint It Black and Good Riddance. The production on this record suits their sound: well-produced but not slick. I'm not blown away, but this is good for what it is. "Only Dicks Don't Like Black Flag?" I couldn't agree with you more. (DA)

Side One Dummy, PO Box 2350, Los Angeles, CA 90078, www.sideonedummy.com

Killer, The – Better Judged by Twelve Than Carried By Six, CD

An interesting combination of horrible Hatebreed-style hardcore with some decent, melodic guitar riffs layered throughout. Some of the more melodic songs are listenable, but as a whole, it just doesn't quite redeem itself. (TK)

Organized Crime, PO Box 213, Brookfield, IL 60513, www.organizedcrimerecords.com

Killers, The – 4, 7"

A slower and more epic Killers than I remember, this is pretty good. Heavy and with some nasal vocals, they've come a long way from their fast hardcore days. With a beautiful picture disc featuring art from drummer Mike Sutfin, this is worth checking out. (DH)

Hater Of God, PO Box 666, Troy, NY 12181-666, www.haterofgod.com

KittyKat DirtNap – I Am A Robot, I Am Talking Like A Robot, I Am A Robot, CD

This is KittyKat DirtNap's relentless attempt to craft the perfect bratty guy/sweet-girl/space-filling-keyboard pop song. Each of its attempts demands attention upfront, à la the anthems of Superchunk and The Anniversary. However, none really distinguishes itself from the others. (TS)

Wonka Vision, PO Box 62680, Philadelphia, PA 19147, www.wonkavisionmagazine.com

Knucklehead – Cosmetic Youth, 7"

Knucklehead is easily the best band in Canada. This latest release finds them improving on their 77/oi punk formula and delivering a record full of hooks, sing-alongs and anthemic choruses. There's just no denying the lure of the aggressive guitars, raspy vocals and infectious melodies. (BN)

Longshot Music, PMB #72, 302 Bedford Ave. Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.longshotmusic.com

Kram Bams – Eickert 3401, 7"

Pretty standard semi-melodic punk rock with super-snotty vocals that left me yawning. (KM)

Slab-o-Wax, PO Box 461082, San Antonio, TX 78246, www.slab-o-wax.com

Kreamy *lectric Santa – Great Plans Laid To Rest, 7"

These five songs are filled with abrasive garage/punk rock that blend noise, sound clips and brilliant hooks to become a cacophony of infectious tracks. It's short, sweet and really great. (MP)

Shut Up, PO Box 2404, Portland, OR 97208

Reviewer Spotlight: Tim Kuehl (TK)

Simpletones, I Have A Date. This is a record that everyone should have. My love of the Simpletones came from hearing their tracks on the Beach Boulevard compilation, and it only escalated from there. These guys were one of the bands that started the Orange County hardcore sound that was made more famous by bands like Agent Orange and the Adolescents. More recently (late '90s) their song "I Have A Date" was covered by the Vandalz. They weren't around too long, and they only officially released a few 7-inches before they broke up and moved on. This CD contains everything they recorded, including a bunch of unreleased stuff, all of which was recorded between '78 and '79. "Tiger Beat Twist," "I Like Drugs," "Don't Bother Me" and "Kristy Q" are all classic songs in my mind, and the rest of the songs don't disappoint. This is great melodic punk rock that you can't help but sing along to. If you don't know who these guys are, do yourself a huge favor and pick up some of their stuff. It was originally released on Posh Boy, but then licensed for release on a few other labels.

What is on the turntable? Bent Outta Shape, S/T; The Didjits, *Fuck The Pigs*; Crucifucks, *Wisconsin*; Registrators, *Singles*; Power For Passion, *File Under Power Pop 1978-85*.

Lake Of Falcons – Set Fire To The Moat, 7"

Here's a powerful three-piece out of Seattle: edgy guitar, throbbing bass and screams that make my throat sore listening to it. They change it up on a dime—fast to slow, screams to near whispers—all while making the transitions natural. It's a good prelude to their full-length. (BA)

Beep Repaired, 4233 Eastern Ave N., Seattle, WA 98103, www.beeprepaired.com

Last Great Hope – Creatures Of Beauty, CD

Overall, it's not a bad rock record, but these guys must decide either to be "rock" or "punk rock." This isn't gritty enough to be balls-out and too corny to be a serious punk band. (DM)

Handout, PO Box 50802 Sarasota, FL 34232, www.handoutrecords.com

🔪 **Last Perfection – Drawing Conclusions, CD**

I was thrown off by the first track, but after that, I was into this strange mix of fast, screamy metal with slow breakdowns. I really like the metal aspects of the record, so the "mosh metal" parts can be easily forgotten. The vocals are all over the place: spoken, screamed, growled. The part that won me is the great screaming guitar harmonies and total early '90s-style soloing. Like I said, it is a strange combination, but it held my ADD-stricken attention well enough to listen twice through in a row. (TK)

United Edge, PO Box 790445, Middle Village, NY 11379, www.unitededge.com

Latest, The – S/T, 12"

There's nothing refined about the rough, raw rock that fill this LP. With a dash of country and a real garage feel, the Latest have something going for them. Plus the singer reminds me of Tom Jones, in a good way. (MP)

Peer Pressure Zombie, PB Box 410325, San Francisco, CA 94141-0325

🔪 **Le Concorde – Universe And Villa, CD**

Stephen Becker should be considered for inclusion in the living history of breathless pop music, joining young Sondre Lerche and Zach Rogue of Rogue Wave as the newest inductees. His debut offerings on *Universe And Villa* are effortless in their transience between the air and the ear, moving through and around one's head like a pleasant mosquito. Simple melodies and able-minded guitar backings mark Becker as someone capable of reminding us to take a second to appreciate the hook. (SM)

March, 562 7th St. #14, Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.marchrecords.com

🔪 **Leaving Trains, The – Amplified Pillows, CD**

The Leaving Trains will probably never get their due. Poppy, catchy punk before that whole explosion, garage- and psych-influenced punk before that whole deal got big, the Trains have played solid, well-crafted songs for around two decades. This live disc is a decent introduction to the band. A little more than half the disc comes from a 2002 live radio broadcast. The sound is representative of the band, though they kind of blow one of their better songs, "A Woman's Clouds." A third of the songs are from less well-recorded shows in the late '80s. (RR)

Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

Let It Die – Stick To Your Guns, CD

Fans of Hatebreed-ish bands will love this record. If you don't like tough-guy hardcore, you will not like it at all. Guess which category I fall into. (TK)

Spook City, PO Box 34891, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.spookcityusa.com

Lethal Rejection – 2, 1, 2, 2, CD

Pretty boring mid- to fast-paced rock with some old-school punk and hardcore leanings. The lyrics and riffs were completely unmemorable and uninspired. (KM)

Day 51, 4742 42nd Ave. SW, #357, Seattle, WA 98116, www.day51records.com

🔪 **Little Brazil – You And Me, CD**

When it comes to a standard pop song about a pretty girl and a young male singer enjoying her company, only to discover she's not what she seems, all we really look for is a little earnestness. Landon Hedges' soft vocals borrow their leisure step from Saves The Day's Chris Conley—save the repeated anatomy references—and their rapier's prick from that place inside where honesty's bravest. Omaha doesn't have a band like this young contender, with its power-poppy guitars and sunny pessimism. It's a different perspective on how the Get Up Kids' *Four Minute Mile* could have gone. (SM)

Mt. Fuji, PO Box 17855, Seattle, WA 98127, www.mtfujirecords.com

🔪 **Th' Losin Streaks – Sounds Of Violence, CD**

Imagine the Makers of the '90s if they were raised in Texas instead of the Northwest. This is top-notch garage that both fans of Estrus and Rip Off Records will like, tough that gap is farther apart than most may think. Members of both the Troublemakers and Zodiac Killers give the band some cred and experience that shows. The production is loud and mixed to perfection, while the band is tight and on for all 14 tracks. What makes Th' Losin Streaks better than the million other bands who have tried to do this sound? The backup vocals are great, both in planning and delivery. The drums—not since Keith Moon have I heard such frantic pounding. (Well, that may be a little exaggeration). More bands need to spend time debating the number of choruses and verses a song should have. These boys obviously have sweated out those details. (EA)

Slovenly, PO Box 204 Reno, NV 89504, www.slovenly.com

Lost Robot – S/T, 7"

Dirty electro-noise. Imagine a couple of spazzy kids locked in their parents' attic, with the energy of post GI Joe mock warfare mixed with an Max Headroom movie. It's good shit to rock out to when you're watching *Road Warrior* with the volume turned off. Fuck thunderdome! (AA)

Ghost Arcade, www.ghostarcade.com

Lost Soul – Chaostream, CD

This is some intense shit—super fucking tight and fast death metal from what is turning into the genre's Holy Land: Poland. Perfect for those days when your landlord says he's going to send someone to unclog your drain and no one shows up. Uncompromising, to say the least. (DH)

Wicked World/Earache, 2nd Floor, West 38th St., New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

Loved Ones, The – S/T, CDEP

This is a pretty decent CD. The Loved Ones play melodic punk similar to the Bouncing Souls. You either like this kind of stuff, or you don't. (SJ)

Jade Tree, 2310 Kennwynn Rd., Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetreec.com

🔪 **Low Budgets, The – Aim Low, Get High, 12"**

Extremely fun and catchy punk rock with lots of organs. They feature an ex-member of the Dead Milkmen. These guys seem like a bunch of jokers, but the music is a really talented mixture of punk and rock with lots of little keyboard parts that keep everything light and somewhat abnormal-sounding. The album starts out with an apocalyptic warning from the future, blaming the ills of society on techno music. Then they launch into a great song with the gang chorus of "Oh Yeah!" The side ends with a nice little instrumental song. Side two picks up again with more hectic fun. Some of the song titles include "Stupid Dead Kitty," "No Money Shot" and "Low Budget Life." Although the songs are kind of goofy, they're really put together well, and the singer has a great voice. You can hear the Dead Milkmen dude's familiar voice pop up at times too. The album

comes with a cool cartoon poster that you probably miss out on with the CD version. Awesome stuff. (NS)

Akhenation Music, 1025 Hamilton, Philadelphia, PA 19123, www.akhenation.com

Lowcloudcover - ... I Took A Second Too Long, CD

Pardon the pun, but this is about two to three minutes too long on every track, mindlessly repeating simplistic drones and hum-drum melodies. Some of the more structured moments have a Trail Of Dead feel to them, but such tendencies are fleeting. All buildup, no payoff. (MS)

Breathing Room, PO Box 4415 San Diego, CA 92164, www.breathingroomrecords.com

Lunar - Turbo, CD

Drawn out and atmospheric, the opening track is the kind of song you'd listen to while walking on the moon. The rest of the tracks are indie rock, but still long. The lack of vocals doesn't benefit this style of music—it's mostly good for sleeping. (DA)

Moonlee, Pot Na Breg 8, 5250 Solkan, Slovenia, www.moonleerecords.com

Magnapop - Mouthfeel, CD

From the "where are they now" file comes the resurrected Magnapop, a somewhat successful power-pop band of the early and mid-'90s. After seeing them open for Sugar (oh man, Sugar...), I always had a fondness for them, though they never really hooked me. They played pleasant, melodic, guitar-heavy power pop with strong female vocals. They were pretty good, but they were never great. This, their first record in nine years, doesn't sound like they've missed a beat. They pretty much sound the same, which is both good and bad. It's good because they still have the chops, but bad because they're still not quite there. Linda Hopper's vocals sound a little flat in the mix and have their relatively limited range, but she's still a pretty strong vocalist. That's Magnapop: pretty good, always just a hook away from greatness. (KR)

Daemon, PO Box 1207, Decatur, GA 30031, www.daemonrecords.com

Make Believe - The Pink 7", 7"

A tad more experimental and dramatic than this Joan Of Arc alter-ego's first EP, *The Pink 7"* includes two songs recorded over chaotic Wurliizer piano backgrounds, topped off with violent drumming and sudden breakdowns into irresistible melodies. Genius? I don't know, but it's plenty fucking catchy. On pink swirl vinyl. (BN)

Flameshovel, 1658 N. Milwaukee Ave #276, Chicago, IL 60647, www.flameshovel.com

Malajube - Le Compte Complet, CD

With grinding guitars, bouncy keyboards and super-energetic vocals, the debut album from this Montreal band is in your face and fun. Sounding both retro and fresh, this short album leaves you wanting more. One warning: It's completely in French, but get past this, and you've got yourself a winner. (MP)

Dare To Care, PO Box 463, Station C, Montreal, QC H2L 4K4 Canada, www.daretocarerecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Laidman (DAL)

X, Under the Big Black Sun. I first got this album on cassette back in high school and for months it never left my side. It wasn't "punk" in the same way Los Angeles or Wild Gift were "punk," yet I found it even more thrilling. Years later, I just picked up the wonderful Rhino reissue, and it has deepened my understanding and appreciation of the record. The story of how they made the album is heartbreaking (coping with the death of Exene's sister and coming to terms with the fact they were never going to "make it big"), but also inspiring (the complex, bold songwriting that melded hardcore and country and blues to create the quintessential American punk record). The descriptions of individual tracks provided perfect complements to what I had long carried in my mind, such as John Doe's explanation of the scorching opener "The Hungry Wolf" as a metaphor for the community you try to create when you're young. I have always considered "The Have Nots" to be one of the greatest songs ever written; with all the quasi-political punk songs about "the system," who has ever belted out a more piercing line than, "the bottom step of the ladder / it keeps getting / higher and higher"? Well thanks to the good folks at Rhino, now I know that the working class bar where the song takes place was based on the taverns where Exene grew up with her father.

Most listened to recent release is *Power by Q* and *Not U*, and I'm also digging the *Scam* zine #5, Dan Sartain, Ted Leo and Rum and Rebellion.

Reviewer Spotlight: Ryan Leach (RL)

Nico, Chelsea Girl. Nico's one of the best vocalists I've heard. She sings like Hubert Selby Jr. writes; her voice perfectly reflecting her bleak environment. This record was released at the height of Nico's popularity, just after her "departure" from The Velvet and her slow, lengthy descent into poverty and heavier drug abuse. *Chelsea Girl's* back cover sums up its contents: an emaciated Nico, with eyes as cold as a shark's, stares blankly, only her natural beauty concealing her otherwise obvious macabre physical and mental state. The music on *Chelsea Girl* is beautifully arranged and performed. It's a perfect juxtaposition to the morbid, sing-speak delivery of Nico. Never a songwriter, Nico succeeds on *Chelsea Girl* with contributions from Lou Reed, John Cale, Bob Dylan and Jackson Browne. When she delivers, "Please don't confront me with my failures / I had not forgotten them," on "These Days," truer words have never been spoken. *Chelsea Girl* is a testament to Nico's ability while at the top of her game.

I hear your heart singing: The Gun Club, *Pastoral Hide And Seek*; V/A, *Let's Get Rid Of LA*; The Thermals; More Parts Per Million; The Reigning Sound, *Too Much Guitar*; Rites Of Spring, *End On End*.

Manda And The Marbles - Angels With Dirty Faces, CD

I really liked their last record, *More Seduction*, a couple of years back. With a slightly more mature sound, this power-pop trio returns with keyboards to help fill out their post/neo wave rock 'n' roll sound. If John Hughes were to make one last great movie about teens in the '80s, the Marbles' songs would be played at pivotal moments in the movie. They play upbeat rock with a really positive vibe that would be the ultimate conversation piece for a road-trip mix tape or perfect for the indie-rock dance night in your town. To top it off, Manda's smooth, sexy voice will no doubt send fanboys' hearts fluttering. If that weren't enough, they cover The Avengers' "Cheap Tragedies" and make it danceable. I will stop here before I seem like a fanboy who couldn't get any to save my life. But after one listen, you may feel the same way. (DM)

Sick House, sickhouserecords@yahoo.com

Manikin - M.4 Manikin, 7"

Three midpace rockers in the vein of early Joy Division make this a nice surprise. Yep, this is a neat little EP, with the dark post-punk melodies and glum vocals set over thick guitars. The B-side, "Shadowplay," is the true gem here with the a-side a worthy companion. (BN)

Super Secret, PO Box 1585, Austin, TX 78767, www.supersecretrecords.com

Maroon - Endorsed By Hate, CD

Straightedge, vegan German meaty metalheads. If there is anything more intimidating in this world, I don't want to know about it. There's an interesting mix between Hatebreed-ish hardcore and At The Gates melodic metal. Although the rad metal riffs sound pretty good, those slow breakdowns are just awful. (TK)

Abacus, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd, Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.abacusrecordings.com

Matmos / Die Monit Batss - split, 7"

This split features two bands who rely on a sort of disjointed rhythm. Matmos do an almost unrecognizable cover of Gladys Knight's "On And On" in their noisy, wild style. DMB play more grooving dance music. Great stuff for noise heads. (DM)

Ache, PO Box 138 1001 W. Broadway #101 Vancouver, BC V6H 4E4 Canada, www.acherecords.com

Max Levine Ensemble, The - Chach, Cops and Donuts, 2xCD

The back of the record says: "Warning: This album may cause death." Yeah yeah, I know, punk irreverence and all, but I'm pretty superstitious and still considered forgoing a listen altogether. Then I heard the first jangly, catchy garage tune, and I couldn't stop. I listened to the whole thing, and I'm still here, so there you go. The songs are nicely layered, often sounding like it's one guy rocking out in the middle of an empty house that slowly fills up with his buddies playing in time. The Bowie-esque vocals are neatly stylized and the short, simple songs are energetic and fun. The lyrics are by turns funny (a song is called "Poop Farm") and smart (such as the clever and skeptical "Democracy") and even profound ("Stop saying what you know / You ain't learned a single thing till you can

feel it in your throat"—nice). The music makes a nice platform for both the silly and serious songs, and they even throw in some horns without making you cringe. All that and there's a giant squid on the cover. (DAL)

Self-released, PO Box 771, Athens, GA 3061, thespoonboy@hotmail.com

Mcenroe Disenfranchised 2 & Pip Skid Funny Farm 2 - Peanuts & Corn Double EP, CD

Straight out of the great white north, Mcenroe and Pip Skid deliver a split disc of accessible, radio-influenced hip hop. The beat production on the record is admirable, but the lyrics remain uninspired. Mcenroe's syllable stabs are decent, but lack fire, and Pipskid's strip-mall gangster façade seems rather trite. (BM)

Peanuts and Corn 30093-RP0 Marpole, Vancouver, BC, V6P 6S3, Canada, www.peanut-sandcorn.com

Miasma Of Funk - Groove On The Mania!, CD

This studio project band features Dave Riley, formerly of Big Black, and the sound replicates a lot of Big Black's dark, grinding clang and bang. However, without Big Black's stronger songwriting and focused pummeling, this becomes—at best—a decent listen, but mostly reminder of Big Black superiority. (RR)

Top Scrap, 4880 N. Hermitage A, Chicago, IL 60640, www.topscrap.com

Michael Columbia - These Are Colored Bars, CD

The sound of world music and jazz spliced with synths and beats. An impressive mix of instrumentation, but something about this album falls flat. Not a horrible experiment, but not very interesting either. (TG)

Alabaster, www.alabaster77.com

Midnight Bombers / Bevelaqua - S/T, 7"

Midnight Bombers play the kind of classic hardcore that gives you a rush and causes you to jump into the pit, all while thinking, "I'm too old for this shit!" Bevelaqua play a rollicking punk rock song about mean, nasty, dirty fucking. (SJ)

Rodent, 590 Minnesota St, San Francisco, CA 94107, www.rodentrecords.com

Midwest Blue - Alarm Clock, CDEP

Maybe they should change their name to Midwest Emo. The intricate guitar parts, the pleasant vocals, the screamed back up vocals, the quiet/loud thing. It all takes me back to Milwaukee, circa 1995, and the second Promise Ring album. These four songs are pleasant enough, but could use more bite. (NS)

Johann's Face, PO Box 479164, Chicago, IL 60647, www.johannsfac.com

Milton And The Devils Party - What Is All This Sweet Work Worth?, CD

This album is exactly what you would expect from a band founded by a couple of English professors: smart and ironic, literary-reference-loaded, Costello-like power-pop with a tendency of being a little too wordy. It starts off great with "End Of The Affair," a concise, introductory cincher loaded with light, little hooks. Song two, "Perfect Breasts," is funny piece written from the perspective of a guy who wants to be politically



correct and sensitive to women yet, at the same time, just wants to get laid. But somewhere around "Heathen Eden," the professors' penchant for prose overcomes their musical sensibilities, and the songs begin to become long-winded and indiscernible from one another. Although I can certainly appreciate folks who find humor in missing apostrophes, I think this album is clunky and needs a little editing. (LW)

Self-released, www.miltondevilsparty.com

Minus Story – Heaven And Hell, CDEP

The Minus Story likes to play with lots of noises, layering vocals, guitars, harmonicas, keyboards, xylophone and percussion to form sweeping, dream-like music. On this, the band pulls the reins a little tighter, producing four perfectly unpolished lo-fi tracks. Includes a cover of the Misfits "Hybrid Moments" and a creepy "true" ghost story. (LW)

Jagjaguwar, 1499 W. 2nd St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.jagjaguwar.com

✪ Misery / Path Of Destruction – Split, CD

Two of the greatest bands from Minneapolis team up for a split CD that the patch-wearing youth of America will be properly clamoring for. I don't think one can rightly discuss the subgenre of crust without mentioning Misery, who has been making music now for more than 15 years. It's true crust, with lightning-fast drumbeats and growling vocals that make it an acquired taste, but Misery managed to attract kids who were into more accessible forms of hardcore. The second track, "Bullshit," is a demonstration of how they've managed to do that because it's an amazingly catchy song for a crust band. Path Of Destruction is a newer band, a super-group composed of members of Code 13, Assrash, Calloused and Impulse Manslaughter. They're great, too, but mix in more influences, borrowing from metal and straight-forward hardcore as much as crust. Both bands are well showcased here, and this CD does not disappoint on any level. (AE)

Rodent Popsicle, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

✪ Misery Index – Dissent, CDEP

Although they seem to have a revolving door of second guitarists and drummers, this band continues to give me hope. Within metal, there are a lot of bands that just can't hold my attention, but with three out of four members of Dying Fetus' best line-up playing on *Dissent*, Misery Index isn't one of them. Shying away from your typical gore or paranoia-inspired lyrics, bassist and vocalist Jason Netherton focuses on the sociological side of things in the 17 minute duration, four-part title track as well as on the song "Defector" that closes out this incredible disc. For any band that chugs and blasts their way along, it's rare for the music to carry some sort of message, but Misery Index don't seem to give a fuck. Sadly, drummer Kevin Talley has once again left the fold (to join a much lesser band, I might add), but his performance here is stellar. Easily the best active metal drummer, the man is flawless in his attack. Harsh, pissed, fast, and full of hate for the government, this is easily my favorite release this issue. I can't say enough good things about this band: a perfect blend of hardcore, grindcore and excellent musicianship. Fucking amazing. (DH)

Anarchos / self-released, www.miseryindex.com

✪ Moaners, The – Dark Snack, CD

When I first heard of this band, it was in context: "Trailer Bride broke up (damn)/Melissa Swingle's in a new band (ah-ha!)." Trailer Bride was one of my favorites, and I really thought their last album, *Hope Is A Thing With Feathers* should've received way more attention than it did. (So those of you who didn't buy it are dumb.) I'd first heard TB on a Bloodshot compilation doing a cover of "Ghost On The Highway" by The Gun Club.

Reviewer Spotlight: Justin Marciniak (JM)

Big Star, *Third/Sister Lovers*. This album shouldn't exist. Despite the band's efforts to sabotage it, bootleggers swept up the mess, and Rykodisc properly released it in 1992, almost 20 years after it was made. Influenced by '60s folk rock and the British invasion, driven by main singer/songwriter Alex Chilton and haunted by commercial failure, the band released two fine power-pop records in the early '70s. Then, while recording what would become *Third/Sister Lovers*, the group self-destructed. As a result, the up-and-down record sounds like an episode of *Behind The Music* without the optimistic conclusion. On one hand, the band cranks out the saccharine "Jesus Christ" and pop songs with string arrangements. But then the band—Chilton especially—engages in some S&M for itself and its audience with intentionally sloppy, druggy tunes, kiss-offs galore, the bleak "Holocaust" and the feedback, Mellotron and cowbell experiment of "Kangaroo." One recent descendant of *Third/Sister Lovers* is Elliott Smith's *From A Basement On The Hill*. Like Big Star, Smith documents personal darkness and deliberately scars the otherwise beautiful songs. Imagine Big Star's final recording sessions to be a late-night drive. Ahead, Chilton sees the band's career dead end. For the rest of the trip, he accelerates, yanks the car over the curb and runs over parking meters and mailboxes. One of Chilton's characters might be speaking for the songwriter himself in "Nighttime:" "Get me out of here," he sings. "Get me out of here / I hate it here / Get me out of here."

Five favorites circa the first two months of 2005: *EP* by The Fiery Furnaces; *Universal Blues* by The Redwalls; *Our Love Will Change The World* by Outrageous Cherry (reviewed this issue); *Pink Flag* by Wire; *Funeral* by The Arcade Fire.

When I tracked down their original material, it wasn't quite what I'd expected. I was instantly smitten by their woozy, bluesy, southern gothic twang, but it didn't really gut up and rock the way the Gun Club cover that introduced me to them had. Well, as soon as I heard The Moaners' *Dark Snack*, I heard the sound I'd been waiting for. Swingle (guitar/vocals) and Laura King (drums) have taken that Trailer Bride sound, done away with the more somber elements and injected it with a shitload of Mudhoney. It sounds fuckin' dirty—not sleazy, but unbathed like a newborn fresh outta the womb, screaming with life. This right here is a real deal, raw-dog rock 'n' roll. (AJ)

Yep Roc, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515, www.yeproc.com

Mon Frere – Real Vampires, CDEP

Dark yet totally upbeat synth-rock/emo-punk—it sounds kinda weird, but this ain't bad at all. Sweet and very powerful female vox soar over a somewhat emo/punk rock sound combined with some heavy keyboard and synthesizer action. It's cute, yet intense, and definitely enjoyable. (MG)

Smug Life, smuglifeinternationalrecordings@yahoo.com

Mommy And Daddy – Fighting Style Killer Panda, CD

Scuzzed out pop-punk bass lines, layered over incessant drumbeats and beep-beeps. Mommy And Daddy (a husband/wife duo) trade off on vocal duty, although both seem to be channeling the same two influences. This is easily comparable to other electro-dance bands out of Brooklyn, but those who gotta dance will admit this is pretty fun anyway. (TG)

Kanine, PO Box 404, Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012, www.kaninerrecords.com

✪ Montag – Alone, Not Alone, CD

When listening to this album, I couldn't help but feel like I was listening to a lullaby. Montreal musician Antoine Bédard, driving force of Montag, has found the perfect balance of orchestral, twee pop and electronica. The electronic element is never abrasive or overdone, but just slightly improves the soothing instrumentation that draws you in. More importantly, the soft vocals are inviting. Amy Millan of Stars does guest vocals on several tracks. Her pairing with Bédard is the highlight of "Perfect Vision," one of the best songs on the album. Other key songs are "Grand Luxe" and "Figures Of A New Color." Simply said, *Alone, Not Alone* is an enchanting album that definitely deserves a listen. Trust me, you'll feel much better if you do. (MP)

Carpark, P.O. Box 20368, New York, NY 10009, www.carparkrecords.com

Motorama – Shy Girl, 7"

I remember reviewing this band's CD a year ago and thinking it wasn't half bad. This 7" brings us more raw, surf-influenced lady rock from Italy. I think fans of older riot girl might like this as long as they don't mind such a raw sound. (KM)

Vida Loca, www.vidalocarecords.com

My Luck – Endurance, 7"

My Luck play vamped-up hardcore like a band that knows what it's doing. With a singer raging like a bull in a China shop, the band are tight without losing their live feel. (SJ)

Not Just Words, De Kiling 4, 8651 CK 1JLST, The Netherlands, www.njwrecords.com

My Way My Love – Hypnotic Suggestion: 01, CD

Somewhere, an anthropomorphic computer is fucking a guitar . . . or something. This Japanese electro-noise punk may be the product of that union or some other half-baked metaphor. It's some pretty good sound-in-fuck. (RR)

File 13, PO Box 804868, Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

Nagisa Ni Te – Dream Sounds, CD

Dream Sounds is an apt title for this four-song, 40-plus minute disc of folksy, meandering, moody music. Makes for nice lazy-Sunday-afternoon background music, and parts of this would make good soundtrack music for an over-lit art house road film, but it's really not my bag of wax. (JC)

Jagjaguwar, 1499 W. 2nd St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.jagjaguwar.com

Nasum – Shift, CD

This great grindcore band from Sweden seemed to be stuck firing on all cylinders on their first two records, but this adds some melody and slower tempos, which really helps. My condolences go out to the family and friends of vocalist Mieszko Talarczyk, who died in Thailand during the tsunami. (DH)

Relapse, PO Box 2060, Upper Darby, PA 19082, www.relapse.com

Nation Blue, The – Damnation, CD

Australia's an awfully long way from Washington, D.C., but The Nation Blue have taken DC-style post-punk, injected it with a nearly lethal dose of hardcore and made an engaging new strain. It's noisy, intense and has great start/stop dynamics. By the 11th track, though, this starts to drag. With some self-editing, these guys could be great. (KR)

Casadeliscore, PO Box 1143MC, Box Hill, Victoria, Australia, 3128, www.casadeliscorecards.com

Nedelle – From The Lion's Mouth, CD

Ten issues ago, I reviewed Nedelle's debut *Republic Of Two*, a glowing pop record without a bad song. Ten issues later, it's the same review with a different record. Beautifully crafted songs with clever lyrics and unconventional instrumentation brought to perfection with Nedelle's amazing voice. (DH)

Kill Rock Stars, PO Box 418, 120 NE State Ave, Olympia, WA 98501, www.killrockstars.com

Neill, Casey – Memory Against Forgetting, CD

This right here is a slice of pure Americana, folk in its truest sense. This compilation of Casey Neill's past 10 years seems old and wise, a collection of stories of the everyday life of common people. Neill's a masterful songwriter, and this compilation highlights his talent. (MP)

Daemon, PO Box 1207, Decatur, GA 30031, www.daemonrecords.com

New Mexican Disaster Squad / Western Addiction – split, CD

I loved the New Mexican Disaster Squad's self-titled album on A-F, and this picks up where that left off. Reminds me of *Can I Say-era* Dag Nasty with a bit more power. The Western Addiction cuts are a bit looser and rawer, more Damaged-era Black Flag. Good shit. (JC)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604-4636, www.noidearecords.com

New Roman Times – International Affairs, CD

New Roman Times write some straight-ahead indie-pop songs with rockier edges and off-kilter guitar jaunts, referencing multiple '80s-ish elements. The recording is well-done, but the best part is the dual male/female vocals working in concert or alternating leads. Hot Hot Heat may have some competition. (BA)

Self-released / Social Recordings, www.thenewromantimes.com

Nifters – Allein, CDEP

Secretly awaiting a reunion album and tour by industrial rock's finest Stabbing Westward, this Swedish group is a bit more fractured in its overall outlook. But their metal harmonies, thick-as-shit guitars and calculated rage give away their crush. (SM)

Black Juju, www.come.to/blackjuju

Nine – Killing Angels, CD

Kind of boring rock with gasoline-soaked vocals. Along the lines of Entombed, but not as heavy or fast. I was expecting larger-than-life European riffs, but this CD is just filled with midtempo rhythms that aren't really too heavy or interesting. There are some parts that hint at greatness, but they're not quite there yet. (NS)

Deathwish, 35 Congress St., Ste. 336, Salem, MA 01970-5567, www.deathwishinc.com

9 Shocks Terror – S/T, CDEP

4Screamy, fast hardcore punk that lacks anything new or creative. It's the same punk everyone has heard a thousand times. It's not the worst thing I've ever heard; it's just run-of-the-mill. O (EH)

Mad at the World, PO Box 20227, Tompkins Square, New York, NY 10009
www.matwrecords.com

☯ Niobe – VoodooLuba, CD

The vocals of Germany's Yvonne Cornelius, aka Niobe, are what make her VoodooLuba palatable. Her tone is straight-up diva and Nina Simone on "Good Old Owl," the disc's token 1940s-style torch ballad. It's the disc's sanest moment, which shifts the focus onto how she messes with it—fuzzing out the production to sound like a 78-rpm record, choosing plucked zithers to have her back and singing in a language that's not quite English or at least sensical. It's straight-up paranormal. And that's even before she chants in a Prince falsetto. Elsewhere, Cornelius filters her mouth noise between disparate jump-cuts of digital glitches and the lowest of lo-fi sound manipulation. At one point, it appears as though someone's scratching on a Fisher Price turntable. There could be a code out there to make sense of VoodooLuba, but that might ruin the fun. (TS)

Sonig, Kleiner Griechenmarkt 28-30, 50676 Köln, Germany, www.sonig.com

☯ NOFX – The Greatest Songs Ever Written (By Us), CD

The cash cow that is NOFX plods along. No disrespect—this band was huge for me, from *Ribbed* to *Punk In Drublic* in particular. Even Fat Mike himself more or less says they've phoned in their past few records (the Decline excluded). This 27-song beast contains all their "hits" and one previously unreleased track. For those of us who have followed the band since they sucked, this is less of a trip down memory lane than expected. Why, for instance, is a throwaway track like "Party Enema" included when awesome *Ribbed* songs such as "Nowhere" or "The Moron Brothers" aren't? It makes sense that *Liberal Animation* (a horrible record) and *S&M Airlines* (not as bad) receive little play here, because the band had yet to hit their stride. Still, it wouldn't hurt to dig a little deeper. Even with their catchiness, NOFX strip-mined a certain style of punk that has been copied thousands of times over: fast, hyper-melodic, guitar-heavy, California-style punk. (You have to wonder where they'd be without guitar octaves.) Still, there are good tracks here ("Bob," "Linoleum," "The Longest

Line," etc.), but you'd be better off just listening to *Ribbed* or *White Trash* . . . themselves. (KR)

Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Nomo – S/T, CD

Seventeen members—take that, ska bands of several years ago. This soul/funk/afro-Caribbean musical monster slaps down the danceable, horn-heavy, mostly instrumental music. It sounds like the past, yet no one particular band or even genre, making it more futuristic despite the lack of electronic bells and whistles. (RR)

Ypsilanti, PO Box 970021, Ypsilanti, MI 48197, www.nomomusic.com

None More Black – Loud About Loathing, CDEP

Jason Shevchuk (ex-Kid Dynamite) and crew go the melodic route on this EP follow-up to their well-received LP debut. Unfortunately, the sound doesn't work well with Shevchuk's raspy vocals, creating the impression that the songs are being pulled in two different directions. If it ain't broke . . . (BN)

Sabot Productions, PO Box 28, Gainesville, FL 32602, www.sabotproductions.net

Nothing Done – Idiot Stomp, 7"

I love this eight-song 7" from Holland of straightforward '80s hardcore. All of the songs are fast and hilarious, with English lyrics principally about skating. The original Dutch pressing of 1,000 has already sold out, but a repress is scheduled from a US label called the Limit. (AE)

Not Just Words, De Kiling 4, 8651 CK IJLST, The Netherlands, www.njwrecords.com

Numbers On Napkins – Waiting For Tomorrow, CD

This rough-around-the-edges pop-punk unit play some really fun stuff that goes from first to fourth gear in seconds. They are better than early Blink, but they still have a similar style to them. I really love the band name, too. (DM)

Bad Stain, www.badstainrecords.com

Off With Their Heads – Fine-tuning The Bender, 7"

One side is Minneapolis-style pop-punk (the best kind), and the other is late '90s Midwestern emo. Either way, they belt out decent songs with creamy—yet melodic—call-and-response vocals. The only thing stopping them is a misplaced keyboard that dulls the edge. (VC)

Redemption Value, 738 E. 41st St, Minneapolis, MN 55407

☯ Om – Variations On A Theme, CD

Om is a duo featuring the ex-rhythm section of stoner-rock heroes, the dreader than dread, Sleep. Al Cisneros (bass/vocals) and Chris Hakius (drums) continue the tradition of mating spacey Sabbath grooves with the trance-inducing, polyrhythmic qualities of dub that they'd mastered on Sleep's swan song, *Jerusalem*. As you may recall, *Jerusalem* was one 52-minute song, separated into different movements (like in classical compositions). *Variations On A Theme* explores a similar aesthetic. It's very much what the title suggests—three movements,

all in the same key, that apply time-signature variations and slight nuances to a central riff. The first movement clocks in at 20 minutes; the next two are 12 minutes each. Now, there's no actual guitar on this album—I guess guitar-god Matt Pike was too busy with *High On Fire* to join his ex-bandmates for the reunion—so the only melodic instrument is Cisneros' ultra-distorted bass. He has abandoned his Lemmy-being-drowned vocal style in favor of a clean, monotone chant for his weird biblical/sci-fi lyrics. I totally dig this disc, but I'd have to recommend it to other listeners on two conditions: 1. You don't have a short attention span; and 2. You've previously engaged in heavy marijuana and/or mushroom use. (AJ)

Holy Mountain, PO Box 420511, San Francisco, CA 94142, www.holymountain.com

One True Thing – Finally, CD

It seems like bands with female vocalists are keeping the post-hardcore sound alive lately. OTT features the backing female vocalist from Autumn To Ashes, now on lead, and members of Taking Back Sunday and Fahrenheit 451. It's two-thirds decent, but I didn't like Ashes back in the day, either. (DM)

Play The Assassin, PO Box 253, Floral Park, NY 11002, www.playtheassassin.com

Open Hand – You And Me, CD

This poppy, guitar-oriented alternative rock gets a bit progressive at times, using single-note guitar leads as intersecting counter-melodies. Other times, they sound a lot like QOTSA, complete with laid back vocals that slide into a high falsetto whisper. Some good, some boring. Riffy tunes like "Take No Action" work well. (AJ)

Trustkill, 23 Farm Edge Lane, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724, www.trustkill.com

Operation: Cliff Clavin – Out Of Control: A Discography Of The 1990s, 2xCD & DVD

Holy shit. The Midwest's DIY leaders-by-example have compiled two CDs with 89 songs, a 34-page zine with a history of the band and explanations of the songs, plus a DVD of live footage. All this for just \$10! Great, scrappy political pop-punk from kids who walk the walk. (JC)

Plan-it-X, PO Box 3521, Bloomington, IL 47402, www.plan-it-x.com

Oscars – Death To America, 7"

So dirty and stupid it's brilliant, this is fast, fun, lo-fi punk, most likely recorded from deep within a Memphis basement. All three songs manage to be catchy without being too poppy and beg to be heard live, because this is obviously a band to shake both your ass and your fist too. (TG)

Bootleg / self-released, 1352 Faxon, Memphis, TN 38104, www.oscarsindustries.com

Other, The – They're Alive, CD

The members of the Other were previously in a Misfits cover band, and this is basically 13 more tracks of the same. There's certainly no shortage of backing "whoa-ohs." If you can't get enough of this sound, the Other are for you. (SJM)

Fiend Force, Blumenthalstrasse 31, 50670 Köln, Germany, www.fiendforce.de

Reviewer Spotlight: Todd Martens (TM)

Mekons, *Fear & Whiskey*. When I was 16, my brother told me that I would like the Mekons because I liked the Clash. So I started with *Fear & Whiskey*. The opening number is a pretty tame, fiddle-driven affair, and the second track is more a narration of war than a song, which, at the time, had the unfortunate side-effect of reminding me of Stephen Crane's *Red Badge Of Courage*. Needless to say, after owning the album for a day, it sat on my shelf for about two years collecting dust. I'm not quite sure what inspired me to try it again, but I know what keeps bringing me back to it. In countless articles on the Mekons, much has been made of the group's willingness to experiment with instruments and genres, barreling from punk rave-ups to sea chanteys to drunken country shambles and so forth. There's a sense of discovery that permeates *Fear & Whiskey*. Whether it's singer Tom Greenhalgh declaring that "oh jeez," he's just a disgrace on "Chivalry," or the way the Mekons bounce through the city like a pack of thirsty punk hillbillies on "Darkness And Doubt," the album sees the Mekons wonderfully stumbling into what was in 1985 new territory for them. Yet the appeal of the Mekons has less to do with their expansiveness or their passion for leftist politics and obscure art. Unlike any other act I've ever heard, the Mekons come off as regular folk, the kind of people you cheer and sing-along to, but also share a pint with.

Stuff worth hearing: Caribou's *The Milk Of Human Kindness*; Giant Drag's *Lemona*; M83's *Before The Dawn Heals Us*; Low's *The Great Destroyer*; Sage Francis' *A Healthy Distrust*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Krystle Miller (KM)

Smashing Pumpkins, *Siamese Dream*. When I saw no one had spotlighted this record before I was a little surprised, but I guess it's not very punk. However, this record is probably in my top three records of all time. This is one of those records that takes me back to a certain time in my life. You know those records you've listened to so much you can go without hearing it for years, play it again and still know every little note and noise of every song? I would guess this has been on a lot of "best of the '90s" lists and with good reason: the walls of overdubbed guitars, awesome melodic guitar lines, amazing drumming, Billy Corgan's whine and the expert production of Butch Vig. This was the Pumpkins' best record before they got all weird and started wearing eyeliner and Matrix coats. It may not be cool to admit, but I'll bet a ton of bands you like were influenced by this record. And I can say that now because it's 10 years old. Really.

Playlist: Pit Er Pat, Shakey (reviewed in this issue); Arameus, *Is Your Revolution Merely For Display* (also reviewed); Metallica, . . . *And Justice For All*; At The Gates, *Slaughter Of The Soul*; The Smiths; S/T.

**Out Hud – Let Us Never Speak Of It Again, CD**

The wait was definitely worth it for this new record. Fans should be excited, and y'all who've never heard of them should hurry to your local record store right away and buy this gem. This incredibly talented five-piece (featuring some members of the much-loved funk-punk dance band !!!) have gone above and beyond on this album; it's much, much more fleshed-out, expanded, produced and danceable than the last record. Although the tracks are still wonderfully rhythmic, funky and jammy, they also steer a little more toward pure electronic dance music and disco. While I am in no way against the current musical retelling of the 1980s UK and NYC, I think Out Hud pulls it off in completely 21st century way. Their inventiveness in synth/electronic mixing and their originality in composing and playing is wholly new. Be sure to check out the following killer tracks especially: "It's For You," "The Song So Good They Named It Thrice," and "Dear Mr. Bush, There Are Over 100 Words For Shit And Only 1 For Music. Fuck You, Out Hud." (Obviously this one wins me over with the title alone.) (MG)

Kranky, PO Box 259319, Chicago, IL 60625, www.kranky.net

Outrageous Cherry – Our Love Will Change The World, CD

Mmm, pop. Outrageous Cherry's principal songwriter, singer and producer, Matthew Smith, could write a how-to book on foolproof pop songwriting. For now, consider *Our Love Will Change The World* to be an audiobook providing these lessons: 1. To make timeless pop songs, go back in time for inspiration and the ingredients. Outrageous Cherry studies the '60s. The band embraces psychedelia as well as the eternal subject matter of girls and the dark sides of relationships. 2. Nothing's wrong with neoclassicism. Smith's songs are concise, verse-chorus-verse-chorus-solo-chorus bursts. Outrageous Cherry knows the formula ain't broke, so Larry Ray's understated leads have a place, and Smith can add organ or synths. 3. Start with solid structure. In his lyrics, Smith uses parallelism—repeating a phrase in each line, for example—to control the songs and make them memorable. 4. Be subversive. When delivering dark lyrics, such as "shock-treatment childhood," the band uses swooping melodies and hand claps. Courtney Sheedy's bubbling bass lines and Carey Gustafson's bouncy beats pour some sugar on the sour and psychedelic songs. The excellent *Our Love* proves Outrageous Cherry is a peer of The New Pornographers and Robert Pollard. Until Smith writes his guidebook, it should be a bestseller. (JM)

Rainbow Quartz International, 440 9th Ave., 8th Floor, Suite 36, New York, NY 10001, www.rainbowquartz.com

Ovipositor – Cease The Day!, CD

Sideways rhythms, talk-sing vocals, clang-n-chime guitars—a description of the components doesn't do Ovipositor justice. Think Minutemen, the Fall and other punk-inspired awesome weirdo bands. (RR)

Self-released, www.ovipositor.com

Paint It Black – Paradise, CD

The eagerly awaited second album from Paint It Black does not disappoint in any way, and it's possibly even better than the first. Singer Dan Yemin has been playing in hardcore bands for so long that he's mastered the form down to scientific perfection. The 14 songs on this album are free from extemporaneous nonsense and cut right to the chase. The lyrics are as tight as the music, with sing-alongs used sparingly enough that when they appear, they're placed just right to make the kids go apeshit. Yemin's been through some serious personal trauma, as he discussed in an excellent interview that was published in *Punk Planet*, but the lyrics

on *Paradise* wisely take personal subject matter and extrapolate it out to broader political themes. Lifetime and Kid Dynamite are missed, but Paint It Black is proving to be just as vital as those classic bands from Yemin's past. This album is guaranteed to be one of 2005's releases to stand the test of time. (AE)

Jade Tree, 2310 Kenwyn Rd., Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetreec.com

Parchman Farm – S/T, CD

I've never felt sad for being too young to have seen Mountain perform. Not coincidentally, Parchman Farm doesn't do it for me. This is verbatim, drawn out, pretentious early '70s blues/arena rock; songs that should end at three minutes are somehow dragged out for an additional two. It's not a total loss; Parchman Farm does have the chops to pull this psychedelic fuzz off. Their rhythm section is tight as hell: Bassist Carson Binks comes up with strong grooves, and drummer Chris Labreche has his John Bonham-inspired moments. But that won't save this record, which needs a dose of editing, originality an inspiration to be effective. (RL)

Jackpine Social Club, 2156 Market Street #4B, San Francisco, CA 94114, www.jackpine-socialclub.com

Parker, Jeff – The Relatives, CD

Jeff Parker extends further into the space between post-rock and avant-garde jazz. His background includes working in such groups as Isotope 217, Tortoise and the Chicago Underground Quartet, each of whom also pushes the boundaries of genres. With *Relatives*, Parker has the magician Chad Taylor on drums (from Sam Prekop, Chicago Underground, Sticks And Stones), Sam Barsheshet on electric pianos and Chris Lopes on bass and other things. These guys each know how to play and work well together, creating a smooth sound whose general feel even recalls the Miles Davis Quintet—though their experiments add definite contemporary flares and twists. On "Rang," noise creeps in over hypnotic piano repetition and guitar strums. For "Beastalk," a rumbling bass plods along with psychedelic touches from everybody else. Parker's guitar fingering is superb and technically masterful. A lot of the time, such adept playing can just seem masturbatory, but Parker's playing consistently propels the feel of the song forward with his unpredictable but fitting notes. For this one, mellow and let the mind roam. (BA)

Thrill Jockey, PO Box 08038, Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

Paulisdead – Let the Losers Slug It Out, CD

Guitar dissonance is all the rage here, as Paulisdead hash out an eight-song full-length that bows to the likes of Sonic Youth and Mogwai. The young Canadian group is at its best when they pull back and do the soft/loud thing. Only then do they reveal a groove beneath the discord. (TM)

Five Sister / Self-released, PO Box 95057 Vancouver BC V5T 4T8, Canada, www.paulisdead.ca

Payoff, The – Send More Paramedics, CDEP

Music being cyclical, it is time to bring back the AmRep sound of the early '90s, and I suggest The Payoff lead the way. The power trio format doesn't let the rhythm section hide behind layers of guitar. Instead we get a tight, pounding drums and bass that is accented by the guitar attacks. (EA)

Self-released, www.beenpaidoff.com

A Perfect Kiss – The Olympians, CD

Dear Diary, I went to my first punk "rawk" show tonight. That cute kid from my Biology class's band played. They were called A Perfect Kiss, which was like totally what I was hoping for at the end of the night. Anyway, the guys were like so good. Their new CD, *The Olympians*, sounds like some other bands I've been getting into like Armor For Sleep and

Jimmy Eat World, but way hotter! I think I'm going to ask the guitarist to the dance next week, but I doubt he'd want to go... he's like a totally famous rock star. I hope he doesn't like that Avril Lavigne-looking girl in our class. She's like a total poser. (MS)

Point Five Limey, 7536 East Warren Drive #15-304 Denver, CO 80231, www.pointfive-limeyrecords.com

Phoenix Bodies / Tyranny Of Shaw – split, 7"

Both bands walk the fine line between screamo and hardcore. Both bands do it quite well. Phoenix Bodies won me over with their cover of Black Flag's "Fix Me." Not bad. (TK)

Init, PO Box 871 Sioux Falls, SD 57101, www.initrecords.com

Pink Spiders, The – Hot Pink, CD

This is an all-out assault on all of the tender parts of our favor, the parts of us that like our rock 'n' roll to lie with us in a big, hooky, synergetic lump. It courts the very threads in us that need the excitement of something that sounds daring. *Hot Pink* has The Pink Spiders comparing love to cigarettes at least a trillion times, and it's just as apt of a metaphor for all that they are: addictive, dangerous, smooth and burning at one end. (SM)

Cl, 739 Manor St., Lancaster, PA 17603, www.cirecords.com

Pit Er Pat – Shakey, CD

This is really, really good, and I can't think of any relevant comparisons. Maybe if Wolfie wrote a really depressing record about death and suicide it would sound something like this. The organ, boy/girl vocals, bass and drums make me think "pop band," but the tone of the music is much too sad for this to be considered pop. I like everything about this release. I can't say I've heard a lot of bands like this before; the people in the band are obviously good musicians, and the depressing pop sound totally works for me. I guess this kind of reminds me of Mary Timony's first solo record, but much less medieval. This might be one of best records I've ever received for review. I hope more people get into this because I'd love to hear another record from these guys and gal. (KM)

Thrill Jockey, PO Box 08038, Chicago, IL 60608, www.thrilljockey.com

Pitty Sing – S/T, CD

Synthy, dance-inspired guitar pop starting to wear a bit heavily on your ears lately too? Hey, someone's gotta get rich off of music this year. If one Franz Ferdinand left you wanting, here's a fairly talented and ambitious American version. (RR)

Or Music, 37 W. 17th St, Suite SW, New York, NY 10011, www.ormusic.com

Plan Of Attack – The Working Dead, CD

Plan of Attack delivers the goods with this absolutely impeccable, fast political hardcore album that falls somewhere between power-violence and classic straightedge hardcore. Fans of Havoc Records bands should look for this one. (AE)

Organized Crime, PO Box 213, Brookfield, IL 60513, www.organizedcrimerecords.com

Plastic Little – F.O.I.L. (I rock), 7"

This quasi-novelty hip-hop group mixes things up with a solid old school (production and delivery) track on the A-side and a sing-songy new school B-side. The A side works far better. (RR)

Sound Ink, 95 Wyckoff St. #3A, Brooklyn, NY 11201, www.sound-ink.com

Plat – Compulsion, CD

From Iceland, this duo create a lush, soothing chaos, composed of the interplay of acoustic and electronic: live guitar and drums ensconced within a tapestry of electronic glitches, crunches, waves and noises. Pro-

Reviewer Spotlight: Sean Moeller (SM)

The Rentals, Return Of The Rentals. More than two years have passed since the release of *Give Up* by The Postal Service, and we're led to believe that it was ground-breaking. It's been implanted and accepted that anything since this record, having any laptop electronics marrying pensive, Death Cab-esque lines of smart sadness, is a direct descendent to Ben Gibbard and Jimmy Tamborello's mailbox project. It's to be assumed that *Give Up* was monumentally mold-shattering. I would like to submit *Return Of The Rentals* as an argument spoiler, suggesting that this Matt Sharp side project did as much for synth, girls-gone-cold songs as the Service ever did. The former Weezer bassist went on to make a less than thrilling follow-up record and two of the lamest acoustic records in recent memory, but on this 1995 album, Sharp plugged together a squadron of flea market and pawn-shop-collected Moogs and keyboards from the world over and created a record that holds up a decade later. I'm still lost in this machine.

Current occupations: *Le Concorde*, *Universe And Villa* (reviewed in this issue); *Half-Handed Cloud*, *Thy Is A Word & Feet Need Lamps*; Louis XIV, *Illegal Tender EP*; The Bravery, *S/T*; Cass McCombs, *PREfection*.

grammed percussion intersperses with the real. Arnar Helgi Adalsteins-son and Vilhjalmur Pálsson aim to put the soul back into electronic, or the ghost back into the machine. They have succeeded. The album is coolly atmospheric often moving in Portishead-like pacing, but it can be climactic, too, with Sigur Ros-like peaks. Intriguing melodies and rhythms can emerge from anyplace within the wide space they create with their music, only to be overtaken by another part that may have been only minor before. These are instrumentals, though voices come into play, but not as foreground, only as other contributions to the sound field. And, bonus, the cover art is intriguing as well—just another indicator of the depth of care that went into this recording. (BA)

Unschool'd, N. Fordham Blvd, Suite 222, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, www.unschool'd.com

Plot To Blow Up The Eiffel Tower, The – Love In The Fascist Brothel, CD

The Plot doesn't follow a formula at all with this creative, sassy record. It's sexy, thrashy and trashy with plenty of time changes, off-time tempos with awesome beats. There are a lot of layers, and the band incorporates horns and eerie piano. It's the Stones meet the Locust. The results are wonderful. (EH) Revelation, PO Box 5232 Huntington Beach, CA 92615 www.revelationrecords.com

Policy Of 3 – An Anthology, 2xCD

I often wonder how it feels to be an "emo legend." Even better, I wonder how it feels to be immortalized with a proper discography (some deserve it, some don't). Most of the bands from this era had no idea what it was, but then, anything Dischord-influenced was emo. Now, it has connotations even the most desperate of DIY acts reject and leave for the commercial bound. It's been years since I've listened to Policy Of 3, having shelved their records into the depths of my collection. But they're mentioned occasionally in conversation—surprisingly, during discussions on the XXX compilation in bars. The songs have held up well, extremely well. A lot of new bands looking retroactively to mid-'90s emo come through our review gauntlet, and rarely do they even touch what Policy Of 3 does here. Nothing sounds cheesy, contrived or insincere, which makes them more relevant than whatever "screamo" or "emo" band out there. It's brilliant punk taking heavy influence from DC's Revolution Summer and played with heartfelt abandon. For the completists: it's the LP, two 7-inches, four compilation tracks and some live tracks spread out over two CDs. (VC)

Ebullition, PO Box 680, Goleta, CA 93116, www.ebullition.com

Polly Darkly – Curses, Avowals, And Other Sworn Declarations Of Revenge, CD

Polly Darkly is atmospheric pop rock 'n' roll, with male vocals backed up by breathy female vocals. Not my genre, but it's well done and has some skillful singing and guitar work. (JJG)

Self-released, www.pollydarkly.com

Prefuse 73 – Surrounded By Silence, CD

Prefuse must have come into the record store I work in and seen that we have him filed under "IDM" and gotten pissed. In his own words, Prefuse says that he sees his music as "nothing more than hip hop," but this is his first record that has featured more than a handful of guests as well as beats that are instantly recognizable as hip hop-based. The collaborations have paid off, though his instrumental tracks are weak. Prefuse manages to make up for it with some pretty hot guest spots by GZA, Ghostface and Masta Killa from the Wu, El-P and Aesop Rock from the Def Jux camp and others like Beans, The Books and Broadcast. At 21 tracks, *Surrounded By Silence* could have used some trimming, allowing people (Ghostface in particular) to get in some more verses than the scant one or two allowed within three minutes, but the overall effect is good, falling just short of amazing due to length as well as inconsistent flow. (DH)

Warp, www.warprecords.com

Orella, Masha – Unsolved Remained, CD

Mellow indie rock with pretty female vocals that remind me of the girl from Heavy Vegetable/Thingy. There are lots of different sounds incorporated into the dreamy songs, like wailing guitar parts, computer beeps and blips, and some orchestral instruments. Very calm music, but full-sounding and interesting. (NS)

Morr Music, PO Box 550141, 10371 Berlin, Germany, www.morrmusic.com

Rancid Vat – We Hate You All The Way from Texas, CD

Rancid Vat. You know them, you love them. Oh wait, no, actually you hate them. Well, guess what? They hate you, too. And they wrote a whole album about it. They even get oddly philosophical about it in a typically funny and rockin' song called "Hatred Is Sacred." (DAL)

Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

Ratcat Hogan – We're Bicoastal, CD

Stylistically lo-fi and a bit too slack, Ratcat Hogan drops typical, yet somewhat enticing, dreary indie-pop. Herbert Bergel's waiver-washy and persistently droning teenager-with-a-four-track vocals make the record somewhat tiresome, but his endearingly honest lyrical narratives provide some explanation and relief. If you're into Trackstar and/or the Folk Implosion, give this a listen. (BM)

Skrocki, www.skrockirecords.com

Rats Into Robots – A Column Of Smoke By Day, A Pillar Of Fire By Night, CD

Thick, screamy hardcore along the lines of His Hero Is Gone: Wailing guitar parts, pulverizing drums and throbbing bass lines continually pummel the listener. A couple of the songs are a little more experimental, but for the most part, this is chaotic, crushing hardcore. (NS)

Slave Union, 1012 Raymond St., Schenectady, NY 12308, www.slaveunion.com

Razor Crusade – Infinite Water, CD

Having reviewed their first EP, I was excited to hear these guys again. They didn't change too much from their last release—it's sort of a less original sounding *Shape Of Punk To Come*. It just makes me want to listen to the Refused again. (TK)

Deathwish, 35 Congress St., Ste. 336, Salem, MA 01970-5567, www.deathwishinc.com

Reason, The – Ravenna, CD

The Reason does a good job fitting the screamo prototype. The majority of the record is more emo than hardcore, and there's more singing than screaming. Their vocal harmonies sound like every other screamo band. Don't forget the acoustic love song, too. They're not bad musicians, just unoriginal. (EH)

Smallman, PO Box 352 Corydon, Winnipeg, MB R3M 3V3, Canada, www.smallmanrecords.com

Reatards – Bedroom Disasters, CD

Before the Lost Sounds and the Wongs, there was the Reatards, a fun and nasty garage punk band of teenage brats from Memphis. This disc collects three out-of-print singles, a bunch of old demos and a ton of great covers. It's gloriously raw and lo-fi, and a total killer. (JC)

Empty, PO Box 12301, Portland, OR 97212, www.emptyrecords.com

Redemption Song, The – Victims, CD

What we have here is an old-school band that has dabbled in other areas of rock and hardcore. *Victims* has the feel of a group with a decent sense of song structure, but one that has yet to write many memorable riffs. Until then, we're just sort of stuck in Purgatory. (SJM)

Future Destination, 406 Brian Drive, Hurricane, WV 25526, www.fdrrecords.com

Red Sparowes – At The Soundless Dawn, CD

Like, oxygen and nitrogen, bro. This instrumental(?) band—several guys from Isis and a Neurosis collaborator—is all about atmosphere and mood. The music isn't nearly as heavy as the résumés would have you believe, but it alternates nicely between calm, sparse sections and dense ensemble explosions. (RR)

Neurot Recordings, PO Box 410209, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.neurotrecordings.com

RedJeton – New General Catalogue, CD

This album is filled with grandiose, sweeping post-rock. The main problem is that it's very predictable. The plucky guitar and heavy bass lines lead up to the crescendo right on cue. There are no surprises, nothing unexpected, and as a result, it feels recycled and fails to excite. (MP)

Drowned In Sound, 61B Pall Mall Deposit, 124-128 Barby Road, London, W10 6BL, UK

Renee Heartfelt – S/T, 7"

Renee Heartfelt play melodic punk with a yearning that is emotionally sincere. The first song, "Picasso," starts with their trademark churning guitar sound that's big enough to fill up your living room. The song

Reruns: new reissues from punk rock's past.

ANTISEEN – One Live Sonofabitch ... And A Hell Of A Lot More, 2xCD/DVD

This edition isn't the first rerelease of ANTISEEN's debut live album, but this newly repackaged version comes with a great all-new second disc of rarities and a lovable DVD of live shows and interviews. What self-respecting scum rocker can resist a three-disc set from the undisputed kings of the genre? (AE)

Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

Chainsaw – We Are Not Very Nice, CD

Another record in Dionysus' slew of rereleases, Chainsaw was a decent, New York Dolls-influenced proto-punk act. They were definitely competent, but certainly not worth taking shrapnel for. If you are looking for lost LA gems, check out the recently released Twisted Roots

collection and The Last's LA Explosion. (RL)

Dionysus, PO Box 1975, Burbank, CA 91507, www.dionysusrecords.com

Exploited, The – Horror Epics, CD

As much as I love defending these progenitors of idiot hardcore spiky punk, this is not their best album. Some of the tracks are essential, but others are unlistenable. This edition is a worthy reissue for their fans, but newcomers should start with a retrospective such as *Apocalypse 77*. (AE)

SOS, PO Box 3017, Corona, CA 92878-3017, www.sosrecords.us

Guitar Wolf – RocknRoll Etiquette, CD

I was a big fan of the last Guitar Wolf CD I received, *Loverock*, and this is just as good, if not better. This rerelease of a 2000 album is raw, rough garage punk that could have been produced for \$100 and sounds all the better for it. Some music needs better produc-

tion to bring out all the nuances, but RRE pegs the meter way over on the VU, and the distortion makes this '70s punk/roots rock band from Japan sound all that more powerful. (JJG)

Narnack, 381 Broadway, 4th Flr, New York, NY 10013, www.narnackrecords.com

Naz Nomad And The Nightmares – Give Daddy The Knife Cindy, CD

All right baby, this is one I was excited to get, as my original 1984 vinyl version is getting rather worn. It's a party record of '60s cover songs and a duo of originals thrown in. There are many records from the '80s that tread this water, but this is the only one by the Damned doing it right. That's right; the Damned put out a '60s garage record under the name Naz Nomad and the Nightmares. Many tracks are classics from the Seeds, Electric Prunes

and Paul Revere and the Raiders. Any music fan will recognize a few tracks, while Nuggets and Pebbles fans will know 'em all. I wish that Dionysus would plug this to Damned fans in hopes of turning them onto '60s punk. I dare you to find any cover of "I Can Only Give You Everything" that isn't killer. Be sure to check out their website and pick up some other great records from a label that hardly misses. (EA)

Dionysus, PO Box 1975, Burbank, CA 91507, www.dionysusrecords.com

Vex – New Words For An Old Revolution, 7"

With songs that were recorded in the mid-'80s, Vex play a decent, traditional punk/hardcore similar to a sped up Adolescents with more political lyrics. While I've never heard these songs before, the sound quality and style bring back memories. (SJ)

Hotbox Review, hotboxreview@hotmail.com



breaks down into an introspective piano interlude, which is joined by a rumbling bass line before fading out on a somber drum beat. Next up, "The Melodramatic," picks things up in tempo while keeping along with the overall poignant mood. The last song, "Bottles," is a bittersweet acoustic number with some more piano that shows this band doesn't need heavy guitars to get their point across. "Picasso" and "The Melodramatic" can also be found on the *Magdalene* EP. (SJ)
The North Sea, PO Box 14844, Richmond, VA 23221, www.thenorthsea.co.uk

Repercussion - And The Winner Is . . . , CD

I am sick of trying to say something nice about this shit. Fuck tough-guy hardcore. This is bad for even my most hated of genres. (TK)
Spook City, PO Box 34891, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.spookcityusa.com

Repos / Fourteen Or Fight - split, 7"

Two Chicago-area bands here, both of them good. The Repos play fast, snotty hardcore, extra sloppy style. Fourteen Or Fight, on the other hand, keep things midtempo and more controlled. Two different styles, but both should appeal to any honest hardcore fan. (DH)
Gloom, PO Box 14253, Albany, NY 12212, www.gloomrecords.com

Retching Red - Get Your Red Wings, CD

Cinder Block spent a better part of the '90s politely asking audience members of her seminal pop-punk band Tilt to not blow smoke in her face so she could preserve her voice. No one could have predicted that the owner of one of the prettiest voices in the history of punk would end up fronting a non-melodic street-punk band like Retching Red. Featuring Cyco Loco from the infamous Oppressed Logic and Joe Fucko from Strychnine/Naked Aggression, this new band's self-released debut will turn heads, from its cover art of a spread-eagled, bleeding-from-the-crotch punk girl on down. Cinder Block continues her career as a challenging lyricist with shocking songs like "Battery Acid" and "Rooster," intellectualizing punk nihilism. Not all Tilt fans will be ready for the lack of "la la" on this album, but those with punker sensibilities won't want to miss it. (AE)
Self-released, 4096 Piedmont Avenue #216, Oakland, CA 94611-5221, www.retingred.com

Rhones - Quitter, CD

"[Rhones] music is raw rock and roll, tossed into a blender and set on dangerous," states Quitter's accompanying bio sheet. All I hear is sterile, T. Rex-influenced pap, accompanied by a bunch of hyperbole. Fuck, man, where are my Minutemen records? (RL)
Self-released, www.therhones.com

Rhys, Gruff - Yr Atal Genhedlaeth, CD

Speak Welsh? To understand what the Super Furry Animals frontman sings on his first solo record, you must. If you don't, then experience the Björk effect: Using his native language, Rhys eliminates lyrical distractions, and the arrangements leave space at the head of the table for the vocals. Rhys resists playing more instruments than he can handle. Guitar chords simply move the songs. Synth lines are secondary. In fact, several drum- and loop-based tracks act as mere media transmitting both deceptively complex melodies and the instrument known as his voice, which become main attractions worth the admission price. Over peppy drums, Rhys gradually adds backing vocal tracks to supplement the lead melody of "Gwn Mi Wn." Eventually, the vocals harmonize and stagger against the main melody to create a medieval jump-rope chant. Rhys enunciates each syllable of "Y Gwybodusion," and it's tempting to sing with him because the melody is so catchy. The strongest melody, however, lives in "Pwddin Wy 2." The melody snakes through like a Pied Piper and attracts other instruments and musical ideas—even an octave-jumping, Neil

Young-esque harmonica solo—until "Pwddin Wy 2" is the most traditionally complete song on a rewarding album. (JM)

Rough Trade/Placid Casual, Chelsea Hotel, Ste. 103, 222 W. 23rd St., New York, NY 10011

Rock'N'Roll Adventure Kids / The Intellectuals - split, 7"

You question the sobriety of both bands on this split and hope that no one was hurt while making it. Dysfunctional drumming on The Intellectuals' side suggests that intellect doesn't extend to knowing what sounds OK, and the Kids squeal and screech through two silly songs. (SM)
Vida Loca, www.vidalocarecords.com

Roger Miret & The Disasters - 1984, CD

OK, so Miret's new band is a long way from Agnostic Front, the band that made him an icon in the hardcore scene, but there is no denying the passion running rampant in the anthemic street-punk songs that make up Miret's latest record. Think '77 punk with a bite. (BN)
Epitaph, 2798 Sunset Blvd. Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.epitaph.com

Rotten, The - Circus Of The Demented, CD

This is what The Briefs would sound like if they weren't good. The band occasionally sounds sloppy, even for this sound, and the mix is terrible. There are some hooks, but it needs better mixing to get a better listen from me—and tune the drums. (EA)
Self-released, 488 Bridge Street West, Waterloo, ON, N2K 1L4, Canada, www.therotten.qb.net

Saltwater Vampires - We Are Masterpieces Created By God, CD

Judging the record by its cover, I never envisioned this album as upbeat pop-punk with an occasional stab at more traditional punk. I certainly didn't expect to like it this much. Turns out I like it as much as the early Screeching Weasel, to whom this record pays homage. (BN)
Self-released, www.saltwatervampires.com

Santos, Rusty - The Heavens, CD

The Heavens is a trippy record, with out-of-tune acoustic guitars and a fucked up mix. I've never done hallucinogens, but if I stupidly did, I would listen to some Syd Barrett or Rocky Erickson—really anything but this. (RL)
United Acoustic, 270 Bowery, #2, New York, NY 10012, www.unitedbamboo.com

Sartain, Dan - Who's Sorry Now?, 7"

This is a departure from Sartain's most recent full-length, *Vs. The Serpentes*. He has moved out of the garage and into the roadhouse, delivering a David Lynchian hillbilly dirge so mournful that by the end he's actually on the barroom floor. The B-side is a noise track threaded together with a nice compelling riff. Great stuff. (DAL)
Bent Rail Foundation, PO Box 2283 Birmingham, AL 35201, www.bentrail.com

Satan's Pilgrims - Plymouth Rock: The Best Of Satan's Pilgrims, 2xCD

Satan's Pilgrims play traditional surf in the vein of the Ventures. With well-written songs and sweet, tangy guitars, this a must-have for surf fans. (JG)
Music, PO Box 1757 Burbank, CA 91507, www.musicrecords.com

Sayyadina - Fear Gave Us Wings, CD

Swedish hardcore combining grind, metal and D-beat. This drummer has some stamina. If you like blast beats, there are plenty on this album. I wanted to like this, but it's too much of the same thing: 19 songs that don't vary too much from track to track. Diversify, and you shall be rewarded. (DA)
Sound Pollution, PO Box 17742, Covington, KY 41017, www.sound-pollution.com

Scurge - Humanot, CD

Like a Duran Duran tribute band covering Orgy on a cruise ship, Scurge create loungey electronic pap that includes a song titled "Tâp The Noodle." One

can only imagine the symbolism. Here's a hot tip for the goth kids at the mall: Hear it now before this explodes at a middle school near you. (MS)
Whatever Way Productions, www.whateverwayproductions.com

7 Seconds - Take It Back, Take It On, Take It Over, CD

I've been a big 7 Seconds fan since I started down the punk rock road as a kid, even sticking with them during their U2 phase. I will even admit that I saw them play on the Ourselves and Soulforce Revolution tours, when many consider 7 Seconds to suck. Well, in the last few years they have been back to their original sound, but with better-sounding equipment and better recordings. Take It Back, Take It On, Take It Over doesn't have a single track that screams classic, but it is a solid record that captures their spirit. This thing sounds good thanks to Bill Stevenson at the knobs and ears. Seventeen tracks done fast and furious, this CD still delivers the goods. Bands can only pull off a few downright classic songs, and there exists no more "Walk Together, Rock Together" moments for 7 Seconds. The innocence is gone, for both the listener and the screamer. This is living proof that you can keep punk rockin' in your later years; 7 Seconds are honest, good guys, and you will listen to this as much as some of their early releases if you just give it a chance. (EA)
Side One Dummy, PO Box 2350, Los Angeles, CA 90078, www.sideonedummy.com

Seymour Glass - Note To Self, CD

Ah, modern rock. It's like punk rock's uncool, born-again uncle. How can Seymour Glass not understand how lame this genre is? How is it that these bands continue to exist, with Rusty shirts and blond streaks in toe? Oh, I remember. It's because they're just faceless enough to score a hit and presumably have no problem selling their integrity to do so. How else could you explain a song like "Rocket Science" with lyrics like "Sometimes I feel like I'm from outer space / so far away I can't feel a thing"? Hey buddy, it's time to give your little sister her diary back. To be fair, what can you expect from a band who probably got their band name from a bumper sticker in Spencer's Gifts? (MS)
Four Five Six Entertainment 110 Greene Street New York, NY 10012, www.456entertainment.com

Shai Hulud - A Comprehensive Retrospective, Or How We Learned To Stop Worrying And Release Bad And Useless Recordings, CD

Wow, they weren't kidding with the title of the CD. Bad and useless indeed, but not without their entertainment value. They even go as far as to add track explanations for a five-second answering-machine message. I may not like the music that much, but at least these guys seem pretty rad. Fans of Shai Hulud should definitely pick this release up. Hell, even if you don't like emo-sprinkled hardcore, the explanation of how a bunch of their records were all misspelled because of a mix-up at the press is pretty damn funny. I would have to say this is worth a listen. (TK)
Revelation, PO Box 5232, Huntington Beach, CA 92615, www.revelationrecords.com

Sharp Ease, The - Going Modern, CD

New wave-influenced, melodic post-punk—whatever label you want to slap on the Sharp Ease, this is slippery music. The beat slides, the bass slips, and the guitar glides over the top. Singer Paloma Parfrey's vocals really lube it up. She chirps, trills and melodically oozes on top of that wet musical background. That all sounds good, but it's great. (RR)
olfactory, www.thesmell.org/olfactory

Shesus - Ruined It For You, CD

Boom, boom, boom! Shesus cried for your sins! A soulful turn with throb-

Reviewer Spotlight: Scott J. Morrow (SJM)

Helmet, Betty. Many purists of early '90s Helmet will tell you that *Meantime* was the band's pinnacle, that they were at their most unadulterated as a tight-knit dropped-D rock machine. While *Meantime* gave form to unquestioned classics such as "Unsung" and "In The Meantime," establishing their pummeling signature sound of one-octave riffs, huge beats, clashing time signatures and stern vocals, Betty gave way to experimentation within the confines of said sound. Without adding anything too unorthodox (guitar effects, feedback, banjo), Helmet incorporated transitions that *Meantime* lacked and that ultimately made Betty more complete than its predecessor. Page Hamilton and company never strayed from the objective, either: to hit you over the head with monster riffage. The distorted, dropped-A bass on "Biscuits For Smut" practically grooves you to death; the beat that kicks off "I Know" readies you for the impending two-chord heaviness. All the idiosyncrasies that made Helmet great are there: the stop-start breaks in action, the eccentric lyrics of Hamilton, the unwavering head-bang potential, etc. As the album nears its end, it takes a left turn. "Beautiful Love" starts with the first minute of the guitar piece from the 1930s ragtime tune of the same name, only to descend into a hodgepodge of dissonance. After another rock tune, "The Silver Hawaiian" takes us to a funk-out world of bass and snarls. One last Helmet standard leads into "Sam Hell," the banjo-based epilogue, and there's really only one question in mind: Why did they bother to record *Aftertaste*?

The new hotness: Fiona Apple, *When the Pawn . . .*; General Patton vs. The X-ecutioners, *S/T*; Harmonic 33, *Music For Film, Television, And Radio Vol. 1*; Old Man Gloom, *Christmas*; Secret Chiefs 3, *Book of Horizons*.

bing, revved up guitar and Heather Newkirk's wailing tugs at your heart-strings. It's full of indictment, righteous indignation and everything in between. It's voluminous power-pop the way it was meant to be done. (AA) Narnack, 381 Broadway, Fourth Floor, Suite 3, New York, NY 10013, www.narnackrecords.com

Shipping News, The - Flies The Fields, CD

Sonically interesting post-punk that takes you on a ride. One song you're up, challenged by the aggressive (and superb) bass lines and deliberate vocals, and the next you're being reeled in by the guitar melodies. Their best album yet. (MP)

Quarterstick, PO Box 25520, Chicago, IL 60625, www.tgrec.com

Shit Cook - Run To The Gun, CDEP

This surprisingly listenable and broad debut from this Canadian sludge-noise is toned down enough that it may appeal to non-noise fans. Interesting samples spliced in between the usual wall of distorted feedback, scratchy, inaudible vocals and ambient guitars. They're probably a good live band. (TG) Divorce, 5562 Bloomfield St., Halifax NS, B3K 1S9, Canada

Siberia - Harm's Way, CD

Try really hard to forgive the suburban-dad-plays-the-blues atrocity that kicks off this disc, and you'll find a tentative but inoffensive slow-core group reminiscent of Mazzy Star or the pallid region from which it takes its name. Nice lyrical imagery for the poets out there, but the rest is a bit hamfisted. (TS) Little Pony, www.littleponyrecords.com

Sightings - Arrived In Gold, CD

Noise-makers can make a bunch of chaos. While I often enjoy that attempt of chaos or the burst of energy at the end of a set, it's not easy to make noise, or good and listenable noise. Sightings' *Arrived In Gold* has some good noise. They make their cacophonies with traditional instruments, but aim to eliminate any trace of their familiar sounds in their work, creating soundscapes instead of traditional songs. On some, hypnotic guitar and drum patterns lie beneath bass guitar buzz, vocals deep within the fray. "Switching To Judgement" is a high mark, with the disjointed quality of a Gang Of Four song though done with metal-on-metal scrapes of guitar, factory-line bass riffs and drumbeats that ricochet off walls (reminiscent of early Einstürzende Neubauten). With well-done noise, the tracks do cohere and hold as a piece, despite a surface of widespread disconnection, and that's what Sightings has done with this

album. Indeed, there are some hooks that are mostly hypnotic in their patterns, but count on a flurry of clangs and din to accompany it. (BA) Load, PO Box 35, Providence, RI 02901, www.loadrecords.com

Sinking Steps... Risingeyes - 2002 EP, 7"

Pigeonholing is absolutely no fun. However, when a band plays within the predictable boundaries of an exceeded style, I suppose it's to be expected. Sinking Steps Rising Eyes' take on moody, delicate-to-furious screamo isn't terrible, but it's colorless and stale. (BM) Init, PO Box 871, Sioux Falls, SD 57101-0871, www.initrecords.com

Six Organs Of Admittance - School Of The Flower, CD

Six Organs Of Admittance, a duo from California, sing songs that seem timeless. SOOA weave uplifting pieces that somehow have a distant quality to them. With the clarity of the recording, you can hear fingers move along the strings while they quickly pick clean, hypnotic patterns. Both play organ in atypical ways, like subtle chimes or wave monoliths. In the standout title track, the intensity of clean acoustics and organ can build to a beehive intensity that's psychedelic in its sensory overload. The guitars aren't always acoustic; there are electric guitars that are fiery in their independence, scorching in background. Long instrumentals stretch on so pleasantly, the vocals can take you by surprise. This is probably the finest work that I've heard of the freak-folk stuff. (BA) Drag City, PO Box 476667, Chicago IL 60647, www.dragcity.com

Sixteens - Fendi, CD

With distorted, goth-wave vocals over minimalist beats and eerie disco synths, this album really doesn't do anything different from other death-rock carnival bands. But it's still pretty fun dance music for when you want to get in touch with your inner goth. (TG) Hungry Eye, PO Box 20403, Tompkins Square Station, New York, NY 10009

Sizzle, Johnny - Metamorphosis, CD

Johnny Sizzle is a cross-dresser, with a whiny voice that sounds like Perry Farrell, who rocks out on an acoustic guitar. Some of the songs are really catchy, but most of them go on too long and get repetitious. (SJ) Crusty, PO Box 59, 1895 Commercial Dr, Vancouver BC, V5N 4A6, Canada

Skygreen Leopards, The - Life & Love In Sparrow's Meadow, CD

Part of the Northern California avant-folk scene (see Joanna Newsome, Devendra Banhart), the Skygreen Leopards can be a difficult but rewarding listen. Melodies quickly go from pretty to abstract, and the duo owes

more the Captain Beefheart than any traditional folk artist. It's coffee-shop music for the indie-rock set.

Jagjaguwar, 1499 W. 2nd St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.jagjaguwar.com

Skyline Awake - S/T, 7"

Skyline Awake are your basic emo band, nothing extraordinary or exceptional, just boring. I wish I had a dollar for every time I had to sit through shit like this. (SJ)

Rosewater, PO Box 41005, Bethesda, MD 20824, www.rosewaterrecords.com

Skyline Awake / Races To April - Virginia Is For Bros, split 7"

Skyline Awake is indie rock with two singers that sounds a lot like Hot Water Music and Avail. Races To April provide some more driving indie rock with cool vocal harmonization. Overall this is a pretty decent split. (EH)

Rosewater, PO Box 41005, Bethesda, MD 20824

Slow Poisoners, The - Melodrama, CD

This concept album is a soundtrack to a nonexistent melodramatic film. It's a campy mix of mariachi, western, rock and goth and Aquabat-like vocals, fronted by a couple of guys who like to wear costumes. The music is not something to listen to regularly, but I'm sure these guys put on a fun live show. (LW) Self-released 1593 McAllister St., San Francisco, CA 94115, www.slowpoisoners.com

Slunt - S/T, CDEP

Someone's trying to sell something. With the "clever" name, the cute female half of the band scantily clad and prominently displayed and a cover of Romeo Void's "Never Say Never" ("I might like you better if we slept together"), combined with lukewarm Nashville Pussy-styled AC/DCisms, I'm not buying. (RR)

Repossession, PO Box 548, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272-0548, www.repossessionrecords.com

SNMNMNM - As Best As We Can!, CD

At first I thought that SNMNMNM was a clever reference to S&M and Eminem or maybe M&M's. But then I realized that it was actually a clever reference to the first letter of all four band members' first names. SNMNMNM play excellent indie rock with guitar, drums, accordion, horns, and, instead of a bass, they use an amplified tuba. Not your average everyday lineup for sure, but unlike some gimmicky bands, these guys actually write fine songs. Standout track "Disco Barry" starts with an eerie waltz played by the horns before busting into a phat disco groove that would make the Bee Gees jealous. (SJ)

Unschool'd, 1289 N Fordham Blvd, Ste 222, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, www.unschool'd.com

Demo-lition derby: CD-Rs

ASdELF - Bicycle Tour 2004, CDR

Mostly incoherent, political ramblings, delivered over a tangled guitar and percussion lines by a guy who calls himself "The Elf." Just whoa. (LW) PO Box 317741, Cincinnati, OH 45231, www.terraphiledistro.tk

Cupcake Larry - Eagle Cow, CDR

A Dr. Demento fan releases dark, funny tracks with Casio drums, buzzy guitar, and electronic swirls and bleeps. Decent if you like your rock goofy. (BA) www.cupcakelarry.org

Drugs of Faith - S/T, CDR

Two songs of grindy rock with awkward vocals. A bit sloppy at times. (SJM) <http://drugsoffaith.qjb.net>

Fire Still Burns, The - S/T, CDR

This debut melodic hardcore release featuring ex-members of Lifetime and Ensign is a superb demo that should get them on a big independent label fast. (AE) 800A Dunellen Avenue, Dunellen, NJ 08812-1031, www.thefirestillburns.net

Force Fed Lead - Hell's Holiday, CDR

That kid who wore the Black Flag T-shirt every day - this is his record. (TS) PO Box 14073, Portland, OR 97293

Genuine Rust - S/T, CDR

Rockabilly that infuses punk and a little bit of country. The singer has a hearty, deep voice, but this demo lacks enthusiasm and kind of drags. (EH) genuinerust@yahoo.com

Goldman - S/T, CDR

Goldman is a female-fronted indie-rock duo, and on this three-song demo they conjure the broken-down tribal pop of Sonic Youth circa-Sister with Joni Mitchell singing. It works for me. (JC) www.goldmanrocks.com

Grogan - Gnome Magic, CDR

Despite the slightly poor recording quality, this rocks out with cocks out: straight-ahead punk rock with pop sensibility. Even the jokey "Gnome Magic" ska track is awesome. (DM) groganband@hotmail.com

Heller Mason - S/T, CDR

This is a solid album of well-written sadcore, reminiscent of the Red House Painters. Track one and the Uncle Tupelo cover are aces. (MP) 1315 Coolidge Ave., Little Chute, WI 54140, www.hellermason.com

Hub City Losers Club - Is It Safe?, CDR

This fantastic poppy punk album is from a supergroup made up of members of Gob, Mcrackins and Deltoros. The songwriting is uniformly tight throughout. (AE) 621 1st St., New Westminster, BC, V3L 2H3, Canada, www.myspace.com/hubcitylosersclub

Mang - Fake Flesh And Other Misconstructions, CDR

Mang stresses the vocal possibilities of experimental music, preferring the weird. Their variations include part spoken word, part operatic, part performance art, part nonsense. "Interesting." (BA) Centsless Productions, 5945 Monticello Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45224

Max Levine Ensemble, The - Chachi, Cops, and Donuts, 2xCD

This ambitious, irresistible sloppy pop compendium collects all of this band's high school recordings. It's in the vein of Plan-It-X type bands and features horns. (AE)

838 W. 7th St., Bloomington, IN, 47404, www.tmle.org

Middle Class Mile - S/T, CDR

This demo lands on the poppier side of punk rock, but it's neither new or innovative. All the songs sound the same. (EH) 6038 N. Knoll Ave Fresno, CA 93711, www.fresnohardcore.net/twofourdead

Strategeme - Recession, CDR

Refreshingly diverse and inventive, Recession's mix of blippy electronics and punchy post-punk shows a great deal of promise. I never thought I'd say this about a demo, but Strategeme is worth seeking out. (MS) www.mon-strategeme.net

Trakes, The - Nine Giants E.P., CDR

They're sticking mainly to the straightforward this time, a good idea for this often-quirky band that plays excellent, hard melodic punk interspersed with experimental moments. (AE)

**So Fox – S/T, 7"**

This here is piece of wax is burning hot. So Fox brings it: fast, tight, greased up, and right to the point. Their male/female vocals and rock 'n' roll-tinged punk serve as a reminder that high octave, distorted pop songwriting will never go out of style. (BM)
Redemption Value, 738 E. 41st St, Minneapolis, MN 55407

Soft Pink Truth, The – Do You Want New Wave Or Do You Want the Soft Pink Truth?, CD

This is an album of covers; songs Die Kreuzen, Minor Threat and Carol Channing are remixed and pounded into a synth, disco pulp. The band claims the working title was "A Comparative Analysis Of Ideological Positions in English Punk Rock And American Hardcore Songwriting," which makes this ass-shake-inducing album even better. (LW)
Tigerbeat6, 3358 24th St., San Francisco, CA 94110, www.tigerbeat6.com

Sommerset – Say What You Want, CD

Melodic hardcore has come a long way since Bad Religion made it all the rage, and bands like Sommerset are taking advantage. Say What You Want is a strong addition to the genre with the sing-along choruses and intense melodies. "The Useless" could be the song that makes this band. (BN)
Casadeliscio, PO Box 1143MC, Box Hill, Victoria, Australia, 3128, www.casadelisciorecords.com

Sonic Boom Six – Sounds To Consume, CD

This is an eclectic and, in turn, somewhat jumbled combination of hip-hop, reggae and ska-punk from the UK. Unfortunately, the female vocals are extremely grating and distract from the melodies. The butchering of a classic Clash single "Safe European Home" killed any chance at redemption. (BN)
Moon Ska Europe, PO Box 184, Ashford, Kent TN24 0ZS, UK, www.moonskaeurope.com

Sophomore Year, The – You Are Here . . . She Is There, CD

The Sophomore Year plays the cheesiest of present day emo-pop, and they play it well. Warped Tour culture is spawning a lot of similar bands, but there's an undeniable appeal to the genre's odd mix of wussiness and aggression, and this band easily earns upper-echelon status within that genre. (AE)
Search and Rescue, PO Box 8260, Ann Arbor, MI 48107, www.searchandrescuerecords.com

Soviet Valves – S/T, CDEP

This Australian combo serves up six slices of tuneful punk rock that's rough around the edges. The singer has a cool shouty-yet-melodic style that sounds like late '70s post-punk. The songs are sharp and short, and "Throne" has a killer whistling part. An awesome debut, I'd love to hear more. (JC)
Self-released, www.sovietvalves.net

Spark, The / Bail Out! – split, 7"

The artwork and layout of this 7" looks awesome. On the cover you have a drawing involving skateboarding, SSD and Uniform Choice shirts and pizza—all things I highly approve of. The back cover has the song titles listed on slices of pizza. The Spark remind me a lot of Dead Nation and Tear It Up. They combine rocking guitar leads with yelled vocals over fast hardcore. The Dag Nasty cover was a nice touch. Bail Out! is the lesser of the two. They're not bad, just generic. Check out their future releases, because once Bail Out! finds their niche, they should be great. (DA)
Rosewater, PO Box 41005, Bethesda, MD 20824, www.rosewaterrecords.com

Spittin' Vicars, The – The Gospel According To . . . , CD

The Spittin' Vicars play slightly above average street-punk which, unfortunately, falls prey to the typical trappings—e.g. lyrical straitjacket. Nothin' here, save a vocal guest spot by T.V. Smith, kids. (RL)
Radio Blast, Hildegardstr. 13, 44809 Bochum, Germany, www.radioblastrecordings.de

Reviewer Spotlight: (Mr.) Dana Morse (DM)

Adrenalin O.D., The Whacky Hi-Jinks of . . . AOD was the best thrash punk band around—or at least in New Jersey. In the early '80s punk was starting to disappear, and metal was taking hold of America. Well, these kids loved both, so they started their band with some heavy-as-hell tunes at breakneck speeds. There sound was pretty damn tough but it always had a sense of humor. Whether it was the epic "Trans Am (The Saga Continues)," instrumentals about battling Godzilla ("AOD Vs. Godzilla") or the cock-rocked and frenzied "Rock & Roll Gas Station," they did it their way. It was always brutal and funny as hell, just like it was meant to be. They even had a stellar follow-up called Humungousfungusamongus that was just as good. They could never make a band like this ever again. Hell, AOD couldn't sound like this later in their career, as they sought a cleaner and tighter punk sound. This record is not easy to find now, but you should try to track it down at a used record store.

Squarewell – Two Toy Model, CD

A very talented band that mixes indie rock with post-hardcore. Great, emotive vocals, nice dual guitar parts and a strong rhythm section. For fans of Texas Is The Reason, Godspeed, Fireside and bands on Rise Records. (NS)
Engineer, 1 Chandos Rd., Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 2NY, UK, www.engineerrecords.com

Starstrangled Bastards – Red, White, and Dead, CD

Angry, fast-paced and pissed off hardcore punk rock that sounds like every other pissed off punk band. You know the type. If you like this stuff, you've probably got a whole stack of CDs of bands that can rock this style better. (KM)
Rodent Popicle, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, USA, www.rodentpopicle.com

Stationary Odyssey – More Or Less Is More, CD

Sweet, dreamy, ambient music that sounds like it were made by a lonely child left in his room with a bundle of old instruments. The band's resident member Aaron Tanner actually collaborated with over 10 different musicians, but it still sounds like a solitary, organic project. My favorite new space-out music. (TG)
TGVN, 1757 Ware Ave., East Point, GA 30344, www.thegreatvitaminmystery.com

Stereo Total – Do The Bambi, CD

Another fabulous album of quirky, genre-bending electro-pop from this infamous duo. With lyrics song in French, German and English, and songs that run the gamut from pure sugary electropop to dancey disco, Stereo Total continue to challenge the boundaries of electronic pop music with their inventiveness and creativity. (MG)
Kill Rock Stars, PMB 418, 120 NE State Ave., Olympia, WA 98501, www.killrockstars.com

Stereotyperider – Prolonging The Inevitable, CD

Ah, Stereotyperider. We meet again. I still think the first Stereotyperider CD is their most immediately enjoyable album, but since I have plenty of time on my hands, this CD has grown on me immensely. These guys still show their pop-punk roots with plenty of catchy songs and harmonies, but there's nothing simple or formulaic about their music. Surrounding the melodies are semi-chaotic guitar lines with odd time signatures in parts. Then there's the ever-present throbbing of the bass. The drums keep everything together with nice rock beats and some more complex stuff thrown in. The vocals are always well sung with powerful melodies. Sometimes I mourn the death of good pop punk, but as long as there are bands like this that can still do something fresh with melodic punk, then I'll be alright. (NS)
Suburban Home, PO Box 40757, Denver, CO 80204, www.suburbanhomerecords.com

Steven J Lawrence / The Mary Reillys – split, 7"

This is a split of two bands doing lo-fi folk rock. Not my thing, but being a critic I need to give some advice: The songs are dreary, dull and could have been done by a thousand other folk rock bands. (JJG)
Mister, 199 South St., #5, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, www.misterrecords.com

Straight To Hell – '02-'04 Discography, CD

Awesomely intense, thrashy hardcore that's fast as hell with frantically screamed vocals. This would appeal to fans of the bands on Prank Records or later Los Crudos. This music would be perfect to play in the back-ground while you tear your room apart and eat your mattress. (KM)
Gloom, PO Box 14253, Albany, NY 12212, www.gloomrecords.com

Strange – Things in Night, CD

The sheet that came with this says something about psychedelic, "satanic carnival music," and I think that comes pretty close to describing it. Oddly enough, I enjoyed this release. The compositions were original, and it was

refreshing not being able to tell where the band was going to take the song next. I'm not going to run out and buy all their releases or anything, but they're doing some pretty interesting stuff here, and it actually sounds good. If you're looking for music with a more original sound, I'd check these guys out. It's experimental and original, but not inaccessible. (KM)
Pidgeon English, PO Box 12561, Raleigh, NC 27605, www.pidgeonenglish.com

Street Dogs – Back To The World, CD

Mike McColgan, the original Dropkick Murphys' vocalist, is back with his new band's second full-length, their first for their own Bass Tracks Records. While the sound should be instantly accessible to any fans of McColgan's previous work, there is a sense of a renewed passion and urgency. Songs like the striking opener "Strike A Blow," the angst-driven "Tale Of Mass Deception" and the bruising but fun, "Drink Tonight" capture a band in tune with the famed Boston blue-collar street-punk scene. The success of the album lies in the catchy melodies, sing-along choruses and street punk's raw energy. While the Dogs' first album, *Savin' Hill*, announced the arrival of a new contender, Back To The World suggests the group is already at the top of the street-punk heap. (BN)
DRT Entertainment, 45 W. 21st St., 4th Fl., New York, NY 10010, www.drt-entertainment.com

STREETS / Rammer – split, 7"

Great skate punk from STREETS (Skateboarding Totally Rules, Everything Else Totally Sucks) with a touch of rock and metal with a dash of Sweden. Both bands complement each other very well, and you should get this before it goes out of print and falls off the face of the earth. (DH)
Global Symphonic, 7624 Sussex Ave., Burnaby, BC V5J 3V8, Canada, www.globalsymphonic.com

Strike Anywhere – To Live In Discontent, CD

This collection of B-sides, rarities and cover songs from Virginia's post-core powerhouse is pretty much what you would expect: blistering tempos; dueling, octave-heavy guitars, shout-along vocals and lyrics bursting with battlefield metaphors. The first two tracks, "Asleep" and "Antidote," start things off well, with plenty of hooks and great intensity. Like Rise Against, Strike Anywhere has always been about the message, and it's pretty typical for this genre. It's easy to be cynical about it, but vocalist Thomas Barnett is such a powerful presence that you can't help put get caught up in it. Overall, *To Live In Discontent* is pretty good: moments of greatness mixed with repetition. If anything, it's a snack to tide listeners over until their next full-length. (KR)
Jade Tree, 2310 Kenwyn Rd., Wilmington, DE 19810, www.jadetreec.com

Stroke 9 – All In, CD

After being dropped from Universal, this San Francisco uber-band decided to put out their own album. No matter, this still sounds like horrible commercial poop written as filler music for teenage rom-coms. Unfortunately, unlike *She's All That*, this is not even ironically enjoyable. (TG)
Rock Ridge Music / self-released, www.stroke9.com

Stubby's Crack Co. – Cuz Life On Earth Ain't All It's Cracked Up To Be, CD

No address, website, nothing given to help you find this record. Luckily, it's not anything I suggest that you buy. The disc has a punk feel, but the sound covers everything from lounge to country. (EA)
Spenard Core, no address provided

Summer Pierre – Far From Here, CD

Ahoy, once again I find myself navigating the grey area between sweet pop enchantment and over-the-top corn-ball generics. Summer Pierre's full-length possesses all the likeable aspects of quality alt-country, but the band is excessively trite, sappy and destined for a *One Tree Hill* feature. (BM)
That Promising Seadog Media, PO Box 372, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130, www.thatpromising.com

Suspicious, The – We're All Wrong, 7"

The debut single from Seattle's Suspicious is a power-pop diamond in the rough. Catchy, hook-filled, jingly pop songs that could have easily been on Bump! circa 1980. Singer Karen Mitchell evokes Nikki Corvette or Joan Jett, with a tough but sweet voice. A little sloppy, a little low-fi, a lot awesome. (JC)

Nerve Wracking / self-released, 425 Boylston Ave E, Seattle, WA 98102, www.thesuspicious.com

Super Furry Animals – Songbook: The Singles Volume One, CD

Long overlooked, Super Furry Animals have been writing amazing pop songs, and this compilation gathers their best work, including early gems "Something 4 The Weekend" and "Play It Cool." With each album represented and a few rarities, this release illustrates why SFA are one of the most interesting bands around. (MP)

XL, 625 Broadway, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10012, www.xlrecordings.com

Swain – Fair Hearts And Fortune Tellers, CDEP

The five songs on *Fair Hearts And Fortune Tellers* sound as if they were written by two different bands. The first two songs are characterized by heavy rhythms, guitar loops and vocals that function as noise, rather than traditional communication. Their heavy, discordant rock momentarily breaks into less weighty melodies, but still remains adept and churning out non-standard, choking rhythms and fluttering guitars. However, the last three songs take a disappointing turn. On "Potomac," the singer actually sings in an earnest way that defeats the approach of the previous style. The proceeding two tracks sound more conventionally post-punk; sadly, it's a substandard conclusion for an EP that started out so strong. (AJA)

Self-released, www.swainmusic.com

Swayback, The – S/T, CD

The chorus of the first tune is: "Blacker than bleak, bleaker than black," which is kind of a neat tongue twister, but the meaning is elusive. The chunky and metallic music is pretty depressing, which I guess counts as creating atmosphere. But it's mostly just depressing.

Too Bad You're Beautiful, www.toobadyourebeautiful.com

Sweetheart – Art Is Dead, CD

With album art depicting a slit wrist, Sweetheart plays the kind of semi-ironic hard rock that would appeal to teenagers drawing the same image on their folders. The band veers toward the artsy side, with frantic chord changes and a schizophrenic vocal approach. It passes the listenability test with its ominous bass lines. (TM)

The Perpetual Motion Machine, PO Box 7364 Richmond, VA 23211

Takedown, The – S/T, 7"

If the singer stops playing the sleazy crooner and belts it like he does in the finale, "Get Out," this SoCal band could perk some ears. Faster! Louder! And drop that swagger! They have the riffs and potential, but lack the grittiness and charge to take it over the top. (VC)

Bridgecityrecords@yahoo.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Brian Moss

A Minor Forest, *Inindependence*. The fuel behind A Minor Forest's wondrous culmination of ethereal post-rock and peculiar dissonance was their coded, jagged sense of raw urgency. The Bay Area trio's splicing of the aspects of the locale's punk and dynamic hardcore tendencies into an otherwise tiresome sound provided the band with an edge that separated them from the narrower acts of then and now. Clearly an influence could be cited eastbound in the lazy abstractions of Slint or the awe striking technicalities of Don Caballero, but upon close examination, the darkened and aggressive likes of Neurosis and Mohinder also bare their teeth. Released in 1998 on Chicago's Thrill Jockey, *Inindependence* is the band's second of three full-length releases and showcases them at their prime. Their songs, sparing and often absent of vocals, twist and float through dreary, somber orchestrations, occasionally twisting unexpectedly into discordant fits of volume and noise. A Minor Forest's music is eloquently manic—capturing the finer qualities of subdued, trance-inducing, instrumental ambience, while also being fearless in the proclamation of grit and grime.

Presently tapping my toes to: Russian Circles, The Thermals, The Future Heads, Buena Vista Social Club, Bad Brains, Superdrag, The Constantines, Dinosaur Jr, Nation Of Ulysses.

Reviewer Spotlight: Bart Niedzialkowski (BN)

V/A, *Turn It Around*. Every once in awhile, I like to pull out my box of 7" records, dig in risking paper cuts and reminisce. Recently, I've been spending a lot of time with Turn It Around, a virtual who's who of the Gilman Street Project. Released by Maximum RocknRoll in its heyday, Turn It Around is composed of two 7" records containing 12 Bay Area bands and 17 total tracks. In addition to the obvious classics (Operation Ivy's "I Got No" and "Officer" along with Isocracy's "Confederate Flags" and Crimphrine's "Rearranged"), the record also contains fantastic contributions from early No Use For A Name ("Gang Way"), Rabid Lassie ("Contragate"), Yeastie Girlz ("Yeast Power") and the underrated Nasal Sex ("Freezer Burn"). Those songs alone are worth hunting this collector's item down. What's more, the record was originally released as a sort of a rallying call to get a sense of community and DIY ethics back into the punk-rock scene. As such, it was an important part of helping establish 924 Gilman Street as an all-volunteer all-ages venue.

Bands to see live in Chicago: Rise Against, The Lawrence Arms, Shot Baker, Burning Bright, The Groodies, The Safes.

Tarentel – Big Black Square, CDEP

This is a 43 minutes of straight improvisation recorded during the *We Move Through Weather* sessions (see review of Paper White). Considered a triad of work, this piece closed those sessions, resulting in its wildest forays into drones and hallucinatory percussion. Good, but their constructed works best it. (BA)

Temporary Residence Limited, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206, www.temporariyresidence.com

Tarentel – Paper White, CDEP

Recorded early during the sessions for the full-length, *We Move Through Weather*, these songs add to the experimentation of their approach. Here, the pieces are plaintive, moving and often beautiful in their impact. These instrumentals are composed of orchestral guitars, complicated drumming and anomalous sounds. A particularly striking piece is the "Open Letter To Hummingbirds," with cascades of lightly strummed guitar and drum rolls accompanied by occasional piano keys that seem to chime in the drift of the wind. On "Golden State Overnight," the drummer performs his own echoes to his beats while the wafts of guitar merge into a Godspeed crescendo. The title track closes the EP, with alternations of waves of sound and minimalist episodes of silence, like the encroaching and retraction of the sea. In fact, the EP does sound as an attempt to capture and mimic the music of nature. It's as good, or arguably even better, than the album that immediately followed its recording. (BA)

Temporary Residence Limited, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206, www.temporariyresidence.com

Telenovela – The Broken Heart Is New, CD

Telenovela work the post-punk sound without coming off as being bandwagon-jumping fodder by any means. They play straight-up, well-composed rock 'n' roll, with a great herky-jerky guitar edge, some funky basslines, spot-on drumming and great dual female vox. Like a modern day Wire with a twist. (MG)

Self-released, www.telenovela.band.com

Televangelist And The Architect, The – The Mass Exodus From California, CD

Outside of having a horrible band name, these folks make some mellow music that can be quite soothing. Taking direction from the Underground and Bright Eyes, these folks make some great relaxing and occasionally rocking tunes for a lazy day. Well done, but just not my thing. (DM)

Undetected Plagiarism, PO Box 397164 Cambridge, MA 02139, www.undetectedplagiarism.com

Ten Seconds To Liftoff / Answer Lies, The – split, 7"

Ten Seconds To Liftoff present two hackneyed rock 'n' roll sing-alongs with lyrics that would be understated as "amateurish." The Answer Lies attempt a few three-chord punk songs that don't improve Side B. (SJM)

Dirt Culture, PO Box 4513, Las Cruces, NM 88003, www.dirtculture.com

These Lies – ... More Than They'll Ever Know, CDEP

Ahhhhhhhh... pseudo-revolution, ambiguous slogans, abused Johnny Thunders pick slides, an overzealous bass and some of the worst vocal work

you're bound to hear, These Lies have everything you don't want. (RL)

Rodent Popsicle, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

This Invitation – The Skin Of Light, CD

This minimalist space rock from New York via San Francisco is so beautiful and droning that Thurston Moore would be proud. Conceptual tunes with the occasionally whispered vocals make for an excellent and trippy soundscape. (DM)

Self-released, 1083 Broadway Brooklyn, NY 11211, thininvitation@hotmail.com

Tiles, The – Please, CD

The Tiles claim that they are an "unsigned indie-rock band that actually wants to remain unsigned"—a DIY ethos that is easy to respect. But with a generic indie-pop sound that comes off as nothing more than average, the band should spend more time straying from their influences (Superchunk, Pavement) than entertaining lofty ideas about the what-ifs of "making it." Recorded by Steve Albini, it seems that the band's lack of originality is the only thing crippling these technically fine musicians. A couple of the stripped down, rhythm-driven tracks show some promise; see "Couch Lock" and "Elisabeth Smile." (LW)

Self-released, PO Box 81866, Mobile, AL 36689, www.thetiles.com

Thoughts Of Ionesco / Heads Will Roll – split, 7"

I was lucky enough to see TOI twice during their tumultuous existence, and they were mind-bending and amazing both times. What we have here are two of three songs recorded as a demo for Relapse that are just now seeing the light of day. A more mature version of their completely suffocating hardcore/metal sound, these songs are a sad reminder of what could have been had the band been able to keep their shit together. Heavy yet melodic, they will be missed. On the flip, we have the much mellower Heads Will Roll, who don't really seem to fit the split very well. Both are/were Detroit bands that have an experimental side, but the singing just doesn't click after my excitement of hearing unreleased TOI tracks. (DH)

Down Peninsula Audio, 22716 Oxford, Dearborn, MI 48124, www.downpeninsula.com

Thunderbirds Are Now! – Justamustache, CD

Thunderbirds Are Now! is a highly obnoxious, silly as can be post-punk band with a high danceability factor. They use keyboards to get the asses shaking, and there's something to be said for having the guts to be as downright in your face about their goofiness as they are. (AE)

French Kiss Records, 111 E. 14th St., Ste. 229, New York, NY 10003, www.frenchkissrecords.com

Tiger Mountain – Get Along Like A House On Fire, CD

Were Tiger Mountain ever to play a suspect crime on an episode of CSI: Las Vegas, the usual challenge of law enforcement to find its motive would be solved before the first commercial. The motive is to rock, and this New York four-piece unabashedly do so in numerous ways, doing it "Banditos"-style à la the Refreshments and changing directions by throwing in plenty of the R&B-ish blues that Mick Jagger's made work for, oh, 80 years. A solid effort that highlights two dynamite songwriters in Mike Jackson and Tyler Lenane. (SM)

Self-released, PO Box 251, New York, NY 10274-0251, www.tigermountain.tv

**🐾 Tigersmilk - From The Bottle, CD**

This improv trio is recorded live at the Empty Bottle in Chicago, and in the quiet parts, you can almost hear the beers being ordered at the bar. This kind of stuff is considered improv jazz, but there's a punk spirit to it—they just use different instruments. It's certainly a complete defiance of traditional musical conventions. First, Rob Mazurek (Chicago Underground, Isotope 217, Stereolab) provides melodic entries with his cornet, though he often erupts into piercing sequences. He also adds laptop electronics that summon tweaks, blips, sine waves and birdsongs to the mix, a feature unusual even for most improv. Jason Roebke (Terminal 4) plucks erratically on the acoustic bass and uses the bow to distort the strings at points. There's also a nontraditional drummer, Dylan van der Schyff (Talking Pictures) out of Vancouver, who can keep a beat like a clock when he wants, but he also has a Pandora's Box of trinkets and other percussive things to knock and ping at various intervals. In total, this is distinctive, and that's always a good thing. (BA)

Family Vineyard, PO Box 12243, Raleigh, NC 27605, www.family-vineyard.com

Tizzy - Dead Band Rocking, CD

Tizzy's solid harmonies between female, and sometimes male, vocalists and ever-shifting melodies work to their advantage—for the most part. The ever-shifting tempo changes can become frustrating, but overall their upbeat rock 'n' roll rhythms, energy, and individuality lend credence to what otherwise could become stale. (AJA)

Self-released, www.tizzyrocks.com

🐾 Tobin, Amon - Chaos Theory, CD

All you avid video-game heads probably already know that *Chaos Theory* doubles as the soundtrack to *Splinter Cell 3*. What you may not know is that Tobin's latest endeavor features a much larger focus on live instrumentation. For those unfamiliar with the long-time Ninja Tune artist, Tobin's previous works have been jazzy, drum-and-bass fusions of hundreds of samples, thoroughly layered and atmospheric. In serving as a soundtrack, *Chaos Theory* has many shifty, malleable moments that work their way into break beats and grooves. Absent, sadly, are the captivating melodies of albums past. The end result is an undulating sound that doesn't dwell too long on rocking out and doesn't leave many lasting impressions. Fans of Amon Tobin will most likely enjoy this, but first-timers and thrill-seekers looking for big beats should stick to his 2000 release, *Supermodified*. (SJM)

Ninja Tune, 222 Dominion #20, Montreal, Quebec H3J 2X1, Canada, www.ninjatune.net

Total Chaos - Freedom Kills, CD

It's been en vogue for years in the underground to pick on Total Chaos and their fans, but *Freedom Kills*, like many of their other releases, is a solid, potent street-punk album. The punks who think they're too good for Total Chaos miss out, while the band perseveres and succeeds. (AE)

SOS, PO Box 3017, Corona, CA 92678-3017, www.sosrecords.us

🐾 Tower Of Rome - All Is Lost, All Is Lost, All Is Yet To Be Found, CD

This chaotic hardcore/grindcore mess gave me a headache. I mean that in the nicest possible way. I think it actually affected my physical and mental state while listening to it. I've listened to a ton of chaotic music in my day, and I guess Discordant Axis or Creation Is Crucifixion would have to be the closest comparison. Yet that still doesn't quite do the sound justice: intense, blasty, insane grindage. Even their song titles are crazy: "We Put The Fun In Funeral" and "Girls That Smoke Gross Me Out To The Max." You can't argue with shit like that. If you are into this sound, you will definitely be into these guys. (TK)

He Who Corrupts Inc, 196 Fairfield, Elmhurst, IL 60126, www.hewhocorruptsinc.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Missy Paul (MP)

Fiona Apple, *When The Pawn*... With things like her "The World Is Bullshit" speech at the MTV Awards, the "Criminal" video, the turkey hotline, the 90-word album title and her onstage meltdowns, it's easy to dismiss Fiona Apple, but one listen to *When The Pawn*... and you'll be hooked. After becoming an overnight sensation with her first album, she returned to us with an increased electronic element to her piano blues, making the music match the frankness of Fiona Apple herself. The combination was perfect. On tracks like "Fast As You Can" and "Paper Bag," her raspy voice lifts and flutters with each beat. On songs like "On The Bound," "Limp" and "Get Gone," her lyrical and vocal stylings create the sound of a woman on the verge of many things: falling truly, madly, deeply in love, exacting perfect revenge, falling completely apart. No question about it, she's intense, but it sounds pure. If you can put all of the off-record behavior aside, you'll find a truly talented chanteuse. Each and every time I listen to this rollercoaster of emotion, I'm still blown away. With her new album finished, as it has been for almost a year, I'm waiting with bated breath for what she has to say next. Unfortunately, I may suffocate since the album is currently being held hostage by her label, due to "lack of singles." It's a shame, because if ever there was a time for "The World Is Bullshit" speech, now is it.

I'm currently loving: Concretes, S/T; Kings Of Leon, *Aha Shake Heartbreak*; The Game, *Documentary*; Velvet Underground, *Loaded*; Tori Amos, *Strange Little Girls*.

Traded To Racine - Our Hopes For Emit City, CD

The instrumentation here is great, with really solid, expressive, emo-style guitar work, slyly original bass playing and drumming that is perfectly relentless. The vocals come across as an afterthought, though, often making the strain audible. It works during the happy chaos of "Disco Vietnam," but not in the more tightly crafted songs. (DAL)

Second Chance, 5160 SW 20th St., Plantation, FL 33317, secchancrcl@aol.com

Treasure State - Migration, CD

Here come three dudes with a batch of midtempo, anticlimactic odes to a singular guitar arpeggio and an atonal-Whitney Houston vocalist—and, remarkably, none is a Kinsella. Instead, singer Robert Mercer's brother leads The Shins, though no Treasure State offering even approaches that group's catchiness or buoyancy. (TS)

Woodson Lateral, 2112 Spokane St., Seattle, WA 98114, www.woodsonlateral.com

Treats, The - Paint Your Blood, CD

This Madison, Wis., band sounds straight out of the garage, playing that same kind of rock/blues/pop/punk that's been done countless times before. The songs are all fine for the genre, but the band needs to experiment a little more with its sound if it wants to stand out. (LW)

Self-released, 5934 Seminole Ct. Apt. 2, Madison, WI 53711, www.thetreats.net

🐾 Tree Wave - Cabana EP+, CDEP

Despite the interesting concept of making music with old computers and video-game equipment, Cabana only works momentarily. The siren-like drone of the vocals, combined with the manic mechanization of the computer noises, creates an odd dynamic. The vocals should chill the spasm of the instrumentation, but the two are just too jarringly at odds with each other. "Sleep" reconciles this juxtaposition a bit better because the music itself is more low-key, as well as integrated with the vocals. Likewise, "Morning Coffee Hymn" has more traditionally created rhythms that fit better with the hazy, feminine singing; it also starts off with recognizable computer sounds, reminding us exactly what is being used to make all the electronic fuzz. Combining the songs with visual imagery, as the band does live (the EP also contains two videos), gives the songs more substance and listenability than if they just remained solo. (AJA)

Self-released, 6011 Ross Avenue, Dallas, TX 75206, www.treewave.com

Triple Threat - A New Chapter, CDEP

This is old-school, straightedge hardcore that's heavily driven by bass and drums. The impeccably controlled distortion makes this EP stand out. Fans of Black Flag and Minor Threat will dig it. (LW)

Livewire, PO Box 007, Mendham, NJ 07945, www.livewire-records.com

Troublemakers, The - Here Come The Troublemakers, CD

With the exception of a song titled "International Flag Burning Day," these might be the most palatable and least feather-ruffling "political anthems" of all time. The Troublemakers play New Orleans horn-based calypso with unbelievably cheesy vocal work. (SJM)

Self-released, www.tftmedia.com/troublemakers

Truckpile, Michael - S/T, CD

When he's not leading a power-pop band called the Kiss Ups, Michael Truckpile (née Wilnock) rides the singer-songwriter circuit with the kind of stale sociopolitical observations that somehow thrive there. Example: "I'm dying for some detox from these trans-fatty potato chips." It's like NPR on a really, really slow day. (TS)

Art of the Underground, 3234 Main St. Upper, Buffalo, NY 14214, www.artoftheunderground.com

Tups, The - I Dressed Up For This?!, CD

Hey kids! Do poo-poo and pee-pees make you laugh? If so, you might like The Tups. The Canadian band makes sophomoric, lo-fi comedy-punk recordings devoted to dick jokes, diarrhea, masturbation and assorted -phillias. Some will giggle, but most will avoid this boring record, which, like this review, is not funny. (JM)

Self-released, the_tups@yahoo.com

🐾 Tussle - Kling Klang, CD

This band won me over awhile back with a couple of 12" singles, and this first full-length fails to disappoint. Tussle is the closest you're going to get to a modern day Liquid Liquid. They are smart dance music players, utilizing whatever they can muster to create some of the best instrumental, rhythmic kraut-rock disco minimalism that you'll ever hear post 1982. The full-length presents a much funkier sound than the smoother dubbiness of their early releases, but the writhing basslines, electronic layers and drumming create an atmospheric sort of dance music that is really just unbelievable. It just goes to show that you don't need pounding electronic beats to get those booties shaking. (MG)

Troubleman Unlimited, 16 Willow St., Bayonne, NJ 07002, www.troublemanunlimited.com

Twenty2 - Unstable, enhanced CDEP

Somewhere between skate punk and a more "professional" rock band you'd see on MTV. Good vocals, lots of hooks, strong guitar parts, a thick bass sound and upbeat drumming. But even as an EP, the songs sound too similar and slick. The CD also includes some multimedia stuff, including videos and pictures. (NS)

New School, PO Box 2094, Oregon City, OR 97045, www.newschoolrecords.com

🐾 25 Suaves - I Want It Loud, CD

Dude, this band rocks! It's that simple. Every quality a grunge/thrash/classic rock head like myself would wanna hear in an album is right here. 25 Suaves, a mixed-gender power trio out of Michigan, does it up right. Take the best aspects of Motorhead, Nugent, the Stooges and Kiss, throw in a little Melvins, and you get a band that's out for blood. Now if you'd rather hear some poser in a spiffy suit knock around on some keyboards and shit, this ain't for you. But if you've spent as many nights as I have downing tall-boys of Miller High Life and listening to Ace Of Spades and Welcome To Hell while clam-baking in your ride, this is the disc for you. (AJ)

Bastard Sun / self-released, 4609 Hunt Rd., Adrian, MI 49221, www.25suaves.com

Two Tears, The - Enjoy Yourself, CD

Two Tears is the latest band from ex-Red Aunts Kerry Davis. *Enjoy Yourself* is a schizophrenic mish-mash of a record, jumping all over the place with what seems to be a bunch of little parts of different songs sewn together Frankenstein-style. Too much quirky, not enough catchy. (JC)

Bent Rail Foundation, PO Box 2283, Birmingham, AL 35201, www.bentrail.com

Twin Fangs - Quelque Chose, CDEP

Twin Fangs play raw rock 'n' roll the way it was meant to be played with a hint of melody to top it off. Paul James Coutts throws down with a big, fat guitar sound while drummer Penny Tentiary is more than capable of keeping up. (SJ)

Rectangle, 507, 10134-100 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 0N8, Canada, www.rectanglerecords.com

Two Ton Boa - Serenade For The Crow That Fell, 7"

Two Ton Boa's music centers around bass and vocals; and the slow, ethereal qualities of both components make for an almost profound listening experience. The songs are both sad and whimsical, not to mention

smart; the B-side is a creepily pointed comment on female body image and plastic surgery culture. (MG)
Kill Rock Stars, PMB 418, 120 NE State Ave., Olympia, WA 98501, www.killrockstars.com

Undergirl – My Flash On You, CD

Undergirl play female fronted punk rock that rocks pretty well. They aren't exceptional, but they'll do in a pinch. (SJ)
Self-released, www.undergirl.org

Usurper – Cryptobeast, CD

Totally old-school metal from right here in Chicago that brings to mind a crunchier Venom. Picture bullet-bets, tons of spikes, and a moustache... this is Usurper. Look, there's a song called "Kill For Metal" on this, and it's called Cryptobeast, for crying out loud! Just go buy it! (DH)
Earache, 2nd Floor, West 38th St, New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

Vacancy, The – Heart Attack, CD

This month's break-up album comes from Pittsburgh four-piece The Vacancy, and it's a fast, catchy, respectable pop-punk effort. Produced by Chris #2 of Anti-Flag, *Heart Attack* is Screeching Weasel reimagined for the Thursday generation. While the lyrics can get silly at times, there's plenty that will likely be scrawled on high school notebooks everywhere. (TM)

A-F, PO Box 71266 Pittsburgh, PA 15213, www.a-frecords.com

Vanishing Kids / Three Bags Full – split, 12"

The first two tracks by Vanishing Kids are nice, dark, sparse pieces—synth-heavy and moody. When they get more complex on the third track, they lose it; it comes off as a clamoring, noisy mess. Three Bags Full is trying to emulate Jesus Lizard. The instrumentals are fine, but the out-of-control vocals sound like a David Yow parody. (LW)

No contact info provided.

Velcro Lewis And His 100 Proof Band – Ruin Everything, CD

Unfortunately, the singer's mutton chops trump the band's musical chops. While he sings boozy and raunchy classic-rock songs that punks will spurn, Lewis sounds like he's gargling phlegm. On the plus side, he delivers clever, memorable lines about 6-inch heels, doing what he feels, naked Twister and nudie Risk. (JM)

Self-released, www.velcrolewis.com

Verona – Memoirs And Anecdotes, CDEP

Holy crap, five songs are just not enough. This melodic punk band with poppy hooks just completely dominates on this CD from beginning to end. I have already listened to this disc several times, and I feel like I can't convey how good these guys are. It's a bit emo, but nobody complained when the first Get Up Kids record came out, did they? That's right, I'm talking to you, cooler-than-you scenester. Down with emo and up with great punk rock! Let Verona lead the way. Seriously, this is really good, a

bit sensitive, but they can rock it out. How can full guitars and a smooth-as-hell rhythm section be stopped when equally matched by great vocals? It can't, especially when playing tunes titled "It's Not You, It's Me" and "I'm a Wreck But So Are You." I promise it's good. (DM)

Round Two / self-released, 25 Charleswood Dr. Pittsford, NY 14534, www.weareverona.com

Verona – Rumored To Whisper Suspicions, CD

Singer Klye Logghe has the operatic I've-been-hurt-by-love yell perfected, and the band treads between the delicate leanings of Straylight Run and the prog-tendencies of Coheed & Cambria. Songs feature a fair amount of guitar fancywork, and the band doesn't believe in subtlety—earnest moments are punctuated by a string section. (TM)

Lujo, 3209 Jennie Drive, Morgan City, LA 70380, www.lujorecords.com

Violents, The – Baby EP, CD

This all-woman three-piece reminds me of Bikini Kill or Sleater-Kinney, but not as hard. It's not bad, but the songs aren't as creative as either of those bands, particularly the vague and simplistic vocals. (JGG)

Self-released, www.theviolents.com

Von Iva – S/T, CDEP

Soulful death disco with a punk/funk twist. Reminds me of The Gossip if The Gossip were nu-new wave. The music is great (really tight synth/dance jams), and the vocals are excellent (intense, bluesy and strong), but the two don't seem to mesh very well. (MG)

Cochon, www.cochonrecords.com

Watchers – Dunes Phase, CDEP

Better percussive, danceable indie rock exists, but Watchers' rhythm section could change that. On the best of the seven tracks—five songs plus two alternate mixes by The Eternals' Wayne Montana—the rhythm section shows initial restraint but subtly releases it until the short songs have to catch their breath. (JM)

Gern Blandsten, PO Box 356, River Edge, NJ 07661, www.gernblandsten.com

We Versus The Shark – Ruin Everything, CD

Too many arrangements on *Ruin Everything* are in disarray. We Versus The Shark commits to tape intense indie rock with occasional heavy emo, but the twitchy songs change before they etch themselves into listeners' memories. With more self-control and concentration on its strongest riffs, the band's future could yield greatness. (JM)

Hello Sir, 201 Pittard Road, Winterville, GA 30683, www.hellosirrecords.com

Weegs, The – Meat The Weegs, CD

The Weegs are new wave on a bad trip. The singer screams like a lunatic while the music bounces around chromatically like an evil Hungarian circus. The music is cool in a psychotic kind of way, but it can also be grating. Not recommended in large doses. (SJ)

Hungry Eye, PO Box 20403, Tompkins Square Station, New York, NY 10009, www.hungryeyerecords.com

Whiskey Sunday – Maldecido, CD

I liked Whiskey Sunday's first album when I reviewed it a few issues back, so I was pretty curious to hear this follow-up. The amount of progress between that album and this one is pretty remarkable. By "progress" I don't mean that they've changed their approach; they're still playing tough, catchy melodic punk rock with tasteful guitar leads and gruff-as-hell vocals. Only now they seem to really be coming into their own as a band and finding their own voice. They've reached the point where the songs don't all sound alike as they employ different tempos, musical styles and instrumentation, but it all ends up being identifiable as the work of the same band. On *Maldecido*, they're living up to the potential they showed on the debut, and it's damn exciting. Fifteen songs without a clunker in the bunch, but standouts for me are "The Brain Changers," "Transcend" and the excellent male/female duet "The Laughing Academies." In closing, since I mentioned how terrible the cover art was on the debut, I feel obliged to say that the cover is much cooler this time around. Great work, guys. (JC)

1-2-3-4 Go!, 732 56th St., Oakland, CA 94609, www.1234gorecords.com

Whitmore – Solstice Rise, CD

OK, this is really three bands in one: the melodic punk ("Too Long To Date," "Promises"), the pure ska ("Sober Days," "Skunk #1") and the energetic combination of the two ("Side By Side," "Bad Intentions"). A spirited cover of The Cure's "Friday I'm In Love" rounds out this nice LP. (BN)

Moon Ska Europe, PO Box 184, Ashford, Kent TN24 0ZS, UK, www.moonskaeurope.com

Whitmore, William Elliott – Ashes To Dust, CD

Whitmore's either one of these old souls trapped in a young man's body or an awesomely good con man. I'm sticking with the former cause these plaintive blues/folk tunes sound like they've been forged out of the real experiences of life—ups, downs and those blessed quiet moments in between. (AJ)

Southern, PO Box 577375, Chicago, IL 60657, www.southern.com

Whole Wheat Bread – Minority Rules, CD

While they owe much to NOFX, Whole Wheat Bread is catchy enough to overlook that. Whether singing anthems of poverty or calling for an old man to stop drinking, they write compact, fast tunes, nearly all of them equipped with a shout-along chorus. A few hidden hip-hop songs add to the fun.

Fighting, 209 S. Hyer Ave. Orlando, FL 32801, www.fightingrecords.com

Wobblies, The – Undesirable Citizens, CD

These four friends from Corvallis, Ore., sound like they're having a really good time playing pop-punk beer-drinking anthems. All the songs on this album are catchy, brief (most under two minutes) and politically motivated. Nothing new here, but these kids have heart. (TG)

Terra Forma / self-released, 3140 NW 9th St., Corvallis, OR, www.wobblies.org

Wolf, Patrick – Wind In The Wires, CD

Slowly moving, mellow music featuring atmospheric instrumentation, dramatic vocals similar to David Bowie and laptop beats. Song 11 touch-

Reviewer Spotlight: Rex Reason (RR)

Brian Eno, *Here Come The Warm Jets*. Even if you're one of those people that can't listen to records in context, this is one that will still blow the doors off your brain and mix your metaphors even today. This record is very much from the studio-as-instrument philosophy advanced in the middle 1960s. Eno layered and twisted the shit out of electric guitars and keyboards to create some utterly bizarre and head-fucking sounds. But underneath all that density is a really solid pop record. The sonic fuckery is a big reason why this record is still talked about today, but if it were just a bunch of wacky noises, it would have dated a long time ago. The oddly timed pianos, tweaked guitars and general electric symphonic studio insanity laying down finely crafted pop under Eno's robotic, manipulated crooning are the parts that make this such a great whole. The layering of shrill, noisy guitars to create a lush, harmonic soundscape (what a word, puke!) predates My Bloody Valentine's use of the same ideas on *Loveless* by almost two decades. Eno took the legacy of the Beatles, ran with it and improved upon it.

Five new and old records owning me lately: Sleep, *Dopesmoker*; The John Coltrane Quartet, *The Complete Africa/Brass Sessions*; Ennio Morricone, *The Soundtracks Dejavu Retro Gold Collection*; The Pogues, *If I Should Fall From Grace* With God remaster; High On Fire, *Blessed Black Wings*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Neal Shah (NS)

The Damned, *Strawberries*. Most people will only acknowledge the existence of two Damned albums: *Damned Damned Damned* and *Machine Gun Etiquette*. I might have stopped at these albums as well if my friend and I hadn't been on a mad search for their song on the Young Ones ("Nasty") where I first heard them. Our search eventually led us to the *Strawberries* album—which we hated. For some reason, I picked it up again, and it became one of my favorite Damned albums. It opens up with "Ignite," the most punk-sounding song on the album. From there the songs slow down and add organs and horns, but they also get more interesting. "Generals" opens up with a piano intro that turns into a catchy rock song. "Dozen Girls" starts off with a '60s-sounding riff and goes into an upbeat number about a playboy. "Bad Time For Bonzo," about Ronald Reagan, is another catchy song, this time driven by its organ accompaniment. "Don't Bother Me" is a slightly more experimental pop song that sounds like one of Madness' non-ska songs. But the best song on this album is "Life Goes On," one of the most beautiful songs ever written. The bass line, the plucky guitar, the organ, the guitar solo and the lyrics all come together so awesomely, if that's a word—a very sad, yet hopeful song. So if you've given up after MGE, give this album a whirl. And the *Black Album* too while you're at it.

I'm Cosby #6, Bathtub Cosby, ya see: 76% Uncertain, *Estimated Monkey Time*; Nada Surf Let Go; RKL, *Still Flailing* DVD; DFA 1979, *You're A Woman, I'm A Machine*; Wildhearts, *Coupled With*, Rain, *La Vache Qui Rit*; tons of hardcore demos off Soulseek.



es on a more upbeat, goth tone, but overall, the CD is pretty calm and sparse, like it would be a good backdrop to a somber indie movie. I prefer the soundtrack to *Teen Wolf* myself. (MS)

Tomlab, c/o Tom Steinle, Bismarckstr. 70, 50672 Köln, Germany, www.tomlab.de

Yuma Nora - Red Train Graphing The Sunset Of All, CD

Yuma Nora's core is just drums and spasmodic electronics, and with that they form torrents of sound. With the help of nearly operatic vocals that sound as if played from old 78s, these noise artists even have episodes of the melodic and rhythmic. It works. (BA)

Deathbomb Arc, www.deathbombarc.com

V/A - Anti War: Anarcho-Punk Compilation Vol. 1, CD

This is a collection of early-'80s punk bands from England. Most of the songs are good, if simplistic. It's a great document of the time if you want to hear what punk was like then. (JIG)

Overground, PO Box 1NW Newcastle Upon Tyne NE99 1NW, UK, www.overgroundrecords.co.uk

V/A - Assault City, 7"

My unfamiliarity with Syracuse's scene renders me ignorant of whether this is an accurate cross-section of local hardcore, but if it's not, those non-affiliated might want to start posing. Black SS and AWOL (both rippers with melodic hooks) blew my mind but Attitude and No Idols highlight this fantastic compilation. (VC)

Reaper Records, PO Box 2935, Liverpool, NY, www.reaperhardcore.com

V/A - Atticus... Dragging the Lake Volume 3, CD

The boys from Blink-182/Atticus and Side One Dummy have again joined forces to release a compilation. This time around 24 bands contribute rare or unreleased tracks with Rise Against and The Sounds leading the pack. Decent variety means you're likely to find something to your liking. (BN)

Side One Dummy, PO Box 2350, Los Angeles, CA 90078, www.sideonedummy.com

V/A - Bandwidth: Celebrating 10 years On Internet Radio WXYC Chapel Hill, CD

As immortalized in Jeopardy! Question last year, WXYC was the very first radio station to simulcast a live signal on the Internet. I know what you're thinking: What the hell is the Internet? Well, apparently it's a big deal and WXYC had a jump on the damn thing. This compilation celebrates the

fantastical merge of radio and webcast occasion by compiling tracks from some of Chapel Hill's greatest contributors to its "scene." Again, whatever that is. While the acts can be categorized as obscure by even the most savvy of indie rockers (\$tinkwork? Shark Quest?), this compilation stands as a testament to WXYC's fiercely independent and innovative spirit. (MS)

Self-released, www.wxyz.org

V/A - Give 'Em The Boot IV, CD

This 26-song compilation covers a bunch of modern day punk styles—ska, street, pop, reggae, and electro. It features big names like Rancid, Joe Strummer and Dropkick Murphys, plus a bunch of previously unreleased tracks. (AJ)

Hellcat, 2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.hell-cat.com

V/A - Flip Flop - Yep Records Compilation, CD

Chapel Hill's Yep Roc Records has a roster of glittery pop and singer-songwriter based acts from the States and elsewhere. With the exception a few minor irritations, the compilation is listenable from start to finish. Finer points include Dolorean's Neil Young-esque twang and the Coma's mellow hook doctoring. (BM)

Yep Roc, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515, www.yeprock.com

V/A - GSL Presents Golden Grouper Vol. 1, CD

This is one hell of a right-minded compilation. GSL has compiled a song each from 18 relatively unknown bands from the San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay metropolitan areas. All 18 fit well within the loose punky/underground sound for which GSL is known. Standouts: Wires On Fire and Operator. (RR)

Gold Standard Laboratories, PO Box 65091, Los Angeles, CA 90065, www.goldstandardlabs.com

V/A - It's A Team Mint Xmas Vol. 2!, CD

This Christmas album from our peaceful northern neighbors includes 13 original, irreverent songs about the dark side of the holidays, as well as a Vancouver all-star cover of Band-Aid's groan-inducing "Do They Know It's Christmas." Most of the tracks are pretty clever; my favorites include "Don't Fear The Reindeer" and "Santa Claus Likes Rich Kids Better." (LW)

Mint, PO Box 3613, Vancouver, BC V6B 3Y6, Canada, www.mintrecs.com

V/A - The Lake Effect, CD

Four Michigan bands share a disc with three to four tracks each. Corcovado have great female vocals reminiscent of the early '90s Britpop. Man At Arms do the Fugazi/Shellac thing well. Spit For Athena are popular and hard to pin down. The Sea The Sea finishes up with a Nation Of Ulysses/Rites Of Spring sound. This is one crazy mix that's totally essential. (EA)

Friction, PO Box 6605 Grand Rapids, MI 49516, www.frictionrecords.com

V/A - Narnack Records Is A Fist-First Sampler Of New Music, CD

Opening with a killer song from last year's Fall album, no other cut on this 21-track sampler quite matches the intensity of those predatory guitars. Yet there's plenty of quality of stuff, from the fuzzed-up guitars of the Coachwhips to the odd country rock of Langhorne Slim to the wonderful sleaziness of X27. (TM)

Narnack, 381 Broadway, 4th Floor, N.Y., N.Y. 10013, www.narnackrecords.com

V/A - Organelle, CD

The Cincinnati/northern Kentucky area not only has a shared airport, but also a music scene categorized by every equation of Deep Elm emo ever to fill a diary. The Light Wires and Humans Bow Down offer two of the strongest tracks with Wires' timid country-emo number winning best in show. (SM)

V/A - Punk Chartbusters Vol. 5, 2xCD

This collection marks the fifth volume in the surprisingly popular series of compilations showcasing bands from around the world covering lame pop songs. There are a handful of interesting recreations here (such as Supabond's cover of "Breakaway"), but a handful out of 51 songs isn't enough to recommend it. (AE)

Wolverine, Kaiserswerther Str. 166, 40474 Düsseldorf, Germany, www.wolverine-records.de

V/A - Sunday Nights: The Best of Junior Kimbrough, CD

I hadn't heard of Junior Kimbrough before listening to this disc, which features people like Iggy And The Stooges, Spiritualized, Blues Explosion and the Black doing covers of his songs. It makes me realize the power that this Southern blues player's songs had and still have. The songs are simple and gritty, and it's easy to empathize with the subjects. Some tribute comps are a couple of good tracks with a lot of filler, but most of these songs are worthy of more than one listen. (JIG)

Fat Possum, PO Box 1923 Oxford, MS 38655, www.fatpossum.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Matt Siblo (MS)

Cursive, *Domestica*. Before Conor Oberst and Saddle Creek were household names dropped by the likes of the *New York Times* and CNN, everyone's favorite Midwestern collective was releasing some of their finest work to date, *Domestica*. Similar to Woody Allen's disturbingly autobiographical *Husbands And Wives*, *Domestica* is a painstakingly personal account of the collapse of Tim Kasher's marriage. The record abruptly starts with "The Casualty," as the listener is introduced to the album's two protagonists, Pretty Baby and Sweetie. Through these characters, *Domestica* voyeuristically examines the disillusionments and distrust of a crumbling marriage, chronicling each infidelity and mind game. While *Domestica* certainly shines musically, Kasher's diary-like lyrics and somber delivery make it sound so immediate. The album culminates with the defeatist anthem, "I Lost The Will To Fight," where Kasher bleakly proclaims that "The icicles hand down like prison bars." Fully aware of his own unhappiness, Kasher's Sweetie succumbs to complacency, choosing to stay in his unhappy relationship. It's a somber note to end a record on, and the poignancy of the line hangs until Ted Stevens' piercing guitar line severs the record, leaving the listener nothing but deafening silence. It's within this ultimate silence that we are left with *Domestica*'s harsh reality: Some problems just don't have any solutions; some stories just don't have happy endings.

These 5 records took my baby away: Sage Francis, *A Healthy Distrust*; Neil Young, *Harvest*; Supersystem, *Always Never Again*; Iron And Wine, *Woman King EP*; Weston, *Got Beat Up*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Tony Stasiek (TS)

The Ruby Doe, *The Flame And The Fury*. About five years ago, The Ruby Doe was the band that rolled its Rs—and not in the way that, say, your dad might when trying to impress the waitress while ordering a dish with chimichurri sauce. More like poppish British aristocrats in white wigs, but in a way that'd jump your ass if it encountered you on the street. Better yet, Seattle's The Ruby Doe found a way to incorporate wussy vocal inflections into the gap between Unwound's mathiness and Motorhead's greased crud on its debut CD. Now out of print, *The Flame And The Fury* spends about 40 minutes about-facing into every trick from the Helmet and Karp songbooks until culminating in an aggressive slab of contrarian rock. It follows a few different rules from the standard guy-rock formula, though its lyrical themes are butcher than Carhartts' talk of car parts meets talk of anatomical structures meets crazy Greek terminology. Better yet, it provided a lesson in indie economics: Shortly after this CD's release, the band's label folded, leaving The Ruby Doe without backing for the follow-up (a concept album based on dreams and sleep) and subsequently, without motivation actually to finish the disc. The past year has seen the group release a tauter CD, *Always With Wings*, with help from members of the Nordstrom family. Look out.

Focus on the Family action alerts: The Arcade Fire, *Funeral*; The Go! Team, *Thunder, Lightning, Strike*; Harry Pussy, *What Was Music?* 1992-1995; Jay-Z, "99 Problems"; V/A, *Painfully Midwestern Comomusic Anthology*, 1990-2005, Vol. I.

Reviewer Spotlight: Lisa Weingarth (LW)

Graham Coxon, *Golden D*. Growing up in the Midwest, I always seemed to be missing out on things. All the coolest shows seemed to be happening on the coasts or in Chicago, four hours from my crappy home city. One of my biggest musical regrets is that I never got to see Blur, my favorite band when I was a teen, perform live. But, redemption is near: Graham Coxon, Blur guitarist and my favorite member, just announced his first US solo tour (which will have passed by the time this goes to print). And in honor, I've got to reminisce about my favorite Graham Coxon album, his second solo release, *Golden D*. Graham became enamored with the American indie-rock movement in the mid-'90s, about the same time Blur was hitting its peak. He incorporated some of his new influences into Blur's sound, but really wanted to experiment more than the band would allow. *Golden D* is where he got his rock kicks out. The album is influenced directly by Sonic Youth, Pixies, Pavement and Mission Of Burma; Graham has even included two Burma covers on the disc. The music is gritty and raw, guitar-heavy and recorded to sound exactly like it was being played live. But what is probably most impressive about the *Golden D* is that Graham is solely responsible for everything to do with it; he wrote all of the songs, did all of the vocal and instrumental work; released it on his own label, Transcopic, and created all of the cover-art to go along with it.

Listening to: Bloc Party, *Silent Alarm*; Comomusic Anthology 1990-2005: Volume I; Mahjongg, *RaYDONCoNG*; Nick Drake, *Five Leaves Left*; Crooked Fingers, *Dignity And Shame* (reviewed this issue).



books

Edited by Joe Meno

YOUR SECRETS SLEEP SAFE WITH ME DARREN O'DONNELL

Why is that only war-mongering right-wing Christians and other assorted religious zealots get to believe in the notion of the miraculous anymore? Among many leftists, activists, and radicals, the lack of attention to the spiritual has had serious implications in the last decade. Looking at revolutionary movements that have actually worked—for example, the participants of the '60s civil rights campaign—it seems clear that a belief in the larger, unnamable forces in the universe can be a source of unity, guidance, and strength. Darren O'Donnell's strange, charming, and often frightening novel, *Your Secrets Sleep Safe with Me*, is a powerful critique of humankind's fear of believing in something greater than itself. Beginning with a terrible incident of road rage and followed by Toronto's CN tower falling into the lake, O'Donnell creates a colorful, doomed world, where a group of youngsters begin searching for the miraculous, the place where individual ideas end and larger connections begin.

The book seems pretty directly connected to your work as an activist. Do you see the novel as a work of protest?

I don't really think of it as protest but more a call to find like-minded people and to create a dialogue about some of the ideas. Protest, it seems to me, needs to be directed at Power and it seems unlikely that many people in power are going to get around to reading it. It's written for the converted—but trying to convince the converted that particular things need addressing. As an activist I'm often frustrated with the lack of attention paid to the spirit amongst people on the left. I believe, or suspect, that the so-called miraculous and paranormal are agents in the world—agents that, I believe, take sides and have allegiances,

and I know this may sound a little flaky. For example, George Bush and his advisors pray every morning and, while they are probably not bending the ear of anybody named god, they are certainly aligning their intent and wills and generating a group power. I think that the Left, when rejecting the church and all its abuses, tossed the baby out with the bathwater. The lack of attention to the spirit has profound political implications. The book, in some ways, is an effort to pose to offer a materialist notion of spirituality, one that has practical applications in struggles against abuses of power.

Do activism-based novels actually work?

As much as some people argue that there is such a thing as activist art, I disagree. I think it's a bit dishonest to conflate the two. While many artists are attempting to address what they see as deficiencies in the world, I think there's a big difference between actively engaging with power and representing engagements with power. Related to this, I think things like culture jamming and consumer activism are also dishonest and not particularly effective. I love seeing billboards messed with but I'm not convinced that it changes anything.

The novel imagines a world that is pretty rapidly falling apart, from unfair immigration laws, chemical dependence, media saturation, and a general loss of human connection. What do you see as hopeful right now?

It depends on when you ask me. Sometimes nothing. Often nothing. Often I think this must be what the Christians call hell. But, luckily, this is tempered by a consistent experience of the beauty of people and of life. This is what, ultimately, gives me hope. People are fantastic things, relationships and love are filled with mystery, knowledge and magic. —Joe Meno

The Peterbilt Journals: True Tales from the Road Alan Haworth Stankygroove Press

Author Alan Haworth calls his stories parables. I agree, since the details tend to be sparse. They don't have definite morals at the end but each story is its own sort of lesson, sometimes sad, often wise. He writes about truckers as individuals, and the book's strength comes from the way he reports one moment, one character at a time, avoiding generalizations.

The Peterbilt Journals gets a PG-13 rating; the only way the book could possibly offend is that it doesn't risk offense. Sex and drugs come up, but aren't expounded on. So here's a long-haul Aesop for you who need a break from JT Leroy's explicitness but don't want to get out of the truck lot all together.

The story "Spools" is one of the shortest at four pages but it's also one of the best. "Spools" starts in a loading dock in Indiana, where the forklift operator has brought his little daughter to work with him. It's a clear, tender, and weird image to start a story with; it sets a tone even though the forklift's daughter doesn't make it out of the first paragraph.

Compelling topics are introduced but Haworth moves on before I'd like him to. That might tell you more about me as a reader than Haworth as a writer, though: When I read that

he's hauling "20,000 pounds of potato chips" my brain shut down for a minute before I could keep reading.

Haworth has a good eye for detail. His voice is casual, informative, and it seems like he's defining his own moral code as it goes along. There's research in these stories, and there's heart in the best of them. I wonder what will happen if, in his next book, he decides to rely on his imagination just as much as he's used his memory and logbooks for this one. —Meredith Grah

Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook Crimethinc Collective and Press

I've been sleeping more soundly lately. I haven't been having as many of those George Bush nightmares. You know the ones I'm talking about, or at least you know of something similar, the ones where Bush is everywhere in the dream. First he's kickin' it on your sofa drinking a beer, then he turns up on your bus while you ride to work, and finally you wake up screaming and punching your pillow when you catch him making out with your girlfriend, or worse yet, he is your girlfriend. Fucking spooky-ass shit. Lately it hasn't been so bad though, and I'm fairly certain I know why.

I sleep better at night just knowing a book like *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook* is out there. This little gem that is published and essentially written by the Crimethinc

Collective (a group based out of Olympia, WA) has given me back my natural eye color. A modern day spin on its name-sake, the book is a freshly stocked Vegas buffet of instructions for committing revolutionary acts. In its 62 separate sections, which were reportedly composed over a three-year period by nearly 30 different collectives, the book covers everything from Banner Drops to Shoplifting, Mental Health to Hijacking Events. It reads like a manual, complete with instructions and diagrams, but also relies on a collective, informative voice to weave its political narrative throughout. There is a brilliant little section on Dumpster Diving, and also more practical instructions for things like smoke bombs, torches, and a DIY cervical exam.

At 624-pages and a 15-buck sticker price this book is a steal in today's literary market. Aesthetically, it's a beautifully put-together book from cover to cover, beginning with the flag-shaped design. Because of this, I have no doubt that it will catch on as a choice edition to many a hipster's coffee table, but it shouldn't be consigned to that existence alone. Buy it, and be sure to read it on a regular basis, even if only in sections. Then go out and do some stenciling. You'd be surprised what a little antifascist action can do for your soul, and your sleeping habits. —Robert Biedrzycki

Send books to: Punk Planet Book Reviews 4229 N. Honore Chicago IL 60613.



comics

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Daphne Adair (DA), Chris Burkhalter (CB), Janice Dillard (JD), Dave Elfing (DE), James Hosticka (JHA). Edited by Anne Elizabeth Moore (AEM)

Angry Youth Comics Vol. 2 #7

Angry Youth Comics' Johnny Ryan displays an incredible range of humor, from Andy Capp-style ludicrous sex jokes to bad-kid-gets-dumped-in-the-homework-factory jokes, to the last comic in this impressive-in-its-way collection, which investigates the arguably timeless nature of booby jokes. This last suggests that even if I live to be 105, booby jokes (and poop jokes and midget-on-a-dick jokes) will probably not strike me as all that funny then, either. Yet somehow writing this review makes it actually kind of funny in a weird way and although I never want to see spaghetti sticking out of a naked cartoon lady's ass ever again, I probably won't throw the comic in the recycling just yet. I may have to do an Elaine Bennis and ask everyone I know if they get it instead. (DA)

\$3.50 US/\$5.60 CAN, Johnny Ryan, Fantagraphics, www.fantagraphics.com

Fault Lines A Primer

Fault Lines a Primer begins with a disclaimer: its six pages serve as a prequel for a larger, upcoming work; it is a sketch designed to introduce characters and generate interest. It succeeds wildly at both. Kire Carlson, an artist known as "Slum" and inker Johnny Destructo have the beginnings of a fascinating story. Hannah, a young woman with a disfiguring scar across her face, has found religion. Not a respectable belief system that has her fondling beads or burning incense, but a spiritualism designed to shut out the world. Having grown tired of the tedium that is working at her father's grocery, she quits. And moves into a cardboard box behind the store. Slum's artwork has a gangsta patina to it, but not so much that it detracts from Carlson's narrative. His figures would work well on a brick wall, but they seem equally suited for bedtime storybooks. These are six excellent pages—readers will demand more. (DE)

[no price given], Kire Carlson, Punchthroat Productions, www.punchthroat.com

Happy: Female (#4)

Josh Simmon's way-too realistic, tripped-out stories of the wandering circus life are nothing but *fucked up*. My only hope for this word is that drunken frat boys will get their hands on these comics, read them for the titlle stories, and then late at night start re-enacting Simmon's tales of on-stage piss-drinkin', oral self-gratification, and shit- and vomit-eating

at parties, thus hopefully developing a little better sense of how they fit into the cosmos. (AEM)

\$3.50, Josh Simmons, Top Shelf Comics, www.topshelfcomic.com

King-Cat Comics and Stories #63

It's difficult to write about King-Cat, Spit-and-a-Half, or John Porcellino's comics work without talking about John's life. His deeply personal, intensely felt daily experiences make up all the drama of his minimalist drawing style and, whether sweet or wretched, the emotions behind these experiences shine through raw and exposed. Thus a comic about a road trip can be made up entirely of horizon lines—a series of eight lines!—and still convey the sorrow of loss, the stillness of night, and excitement for the future. No one else in comics has managed to convey so very much with so very little for so very, very long. (AEM)

\$3.00, John Porcellino, Spit-and-a-Half, PO Box 170535, San Francisco, CA 94117, www.king-cat.net

Krachmacher #1

Krachmacher consists of three stories by Meathaus alum Jim Campbell. The first, "At The Shore," involves Marianne's reluctant trip to the beach with some friends. She has a bad history with the ocean that isn't totally explained in this first installment, but which seems well-founded when cars begin sinking into the sand. The dialogue is deliberately stilted, but the comic overall is redeemed by Campbell's consistently excellent stylized full-color artwork. The story "ZX2000" is brief, cute, and quite awesome. Elderly Joel tells of his abduction by a robot bent on the destruction of the human race, and how he managed to save mankind. If this one doesn't make you smile, you may not be such a nice person. Rounding out the issue is one of Campbell's ongoing Firefox stories, starring a boy with a "dog hat" and his good buddy, the talking Pork Roast—another charmer. (CB)

\$6.50, Jim Campbell, Alternative Comics, ISBN 1-891867-85-7

P

P takes its name from the pizza box featured prominently on its cover. Written in Italian (but with a charming translation insert), it tells the story of a fellow who plans to meet up with his beautiful girlfriend Chiara

at a fireworks display. All of it told in 33 sentences. The story is as simple as the flat, Matisse-style artwork that tells it.

But it is a story far greater than the sum of its parts. Those 33 lines are nearly enough to cause an irrational desire to sell all of one's possessions and take off for Roma. To sit under the stars with Chiara... it'd be worth it. (DE)

[no price given], Alessandro Baronciani, Vida Loca, www.vidalocarecords.com

P.S. Comics

File this comic under painfully cute! It is well drawn, well written, and has enough of a sardonic bite to keep you interested. Main characters include Yorkie dogs, various fruit, and a mug. The highlight, "Me Time," follows the life of a lonely apple, daydreaming of a lemony love while fighting the oppression of office life and nights out at Chevy's with her crass co-workers. This is choice material. Anytime you've got a pear and an orange high-fiving while talking about titties and a banana flashing the double bird, you've got a winner. (JD)

\$3 (includes shipping), Melanie Lewis, self published, www.pscomics.com

The Pain: When Will It End?

A collection of one-page comics in a style similar to the current-event humor pieces found in Sunday papers outside the comics page, only here injected with mass murder, pornography, and psychosis. It's like if Raymond Pettibon were boring. The humor ranges from sophomoric absurdism to nauseated reflection on self and society. Once or twice Kreidler nails it, but mostly his profundities struck me as superficial and often unfunny. David Foster Wallace says, "Kreidler rules." But then I always took David Foster Wallace for a schmuck. Myself, I just kept wondering, when will it end? (CB)

\$14.95, Tim Kreider, Fantagraphics, ISBN 1-56097-568-7

Perverso

Perverso catalogues the exploits of Roy, a pornography photographer-cum-family portrait artist—a transformation brought on by an incident worthy of Nabokov. Given the subject matter, this is a book that is clearly meant for (as the cover exclaims enthusiastically) mature readers only.

But it's not a stroke book by any stretch. Rich Tommaso captures Roy's

fixations with a brutal simplicity. Anatomical details become mere squiggles of ink. Devoid of sexuality they evoke not desire, but pity. Roy, with his thin moustache and slicked back hair, is a sad and unpleasant man.

Fortunately, Tommaso is not above providing comic relief. The back cover of the book features two single-panel stag comics drawn in classic *Playboy* style. They, together with the sometimes difficult storyline, make *Perverso* a complicated and thought-provoking comic. (DE)
\$4.95, Rich Tommaso, Alternative Comics, ISBN 1-891867-53-9

Plastic Farm #6-8

Chester Carter grew up in a psychiatric hospital run by religious zealots. Not an optimal environment for a child, it led Chester into a disastrous suicide attempt and the creation of an (perhaps) imaginary cowboy hero known as the Kamikaze Kid. Chester also sees four-eyed mice. Sitting at a nameless airport bar, he tells his story to strangers. *Plastic Farm* is a strange and unnerving comic book. Like photographs documenting a bear mauling or shark attack, it is physically uncomfortable to read and nearly impossible to put down. The prose of Rafer Roberts is accompanied by his artwork; manic and heavy-handed drawings that spring from a high school year book. Though somewhat amateurish (Roberts is an author before he's an artist) the art is well suited for the story—it lends much to the overall sense of unease. Rafer Roberts is scary and brilliant. Thankfully, these qualities are not mutually exclusive. (DE)
\$2.95, Rafer Roberts, Plastic Farm Press, www.plasticfarm.com

Less Than Heroes

Costumed heroes aren't drawn to Philadelphia. They prefer New York, Gotham and Metropolis to the city of brotherly love. Philly has neither the glamour nor the fast-paced lifestyle necessary for high-stakes crime and crimefighting. Which suits the members of Threshold, the city's officially contracted non-union heroes just fine. They much prefer a lazy evening of Hydrox cookies to encounters with maniacal villains. Which

isn't to say that they sit idle: Indeed, when faced with a threat from the Stamp Collector (evil personified via betrayal and philately), they answer the call. The non-hero superhero comic book isn't rare. But where others have written of costumed heroes coping with schizophrenia and alcoholism, David Yurkovich has infused the genre with a wry and sometimes bizarre humor. (DE)

\$14.95, David Yurkovich, Top Shelf ISBN 1-891830-51-1

SnakePit, Quarterly Edition #9

J Church bassist Ben White has done a good job of making his diary into an engaging comic. By restricting himself to certain formalities—one three-panel comic every 24-hour period, opening with his current musical choice—he is free to best capture the essence of each day. It's not a groundbreaking work of art; just an honest view of life, and that's definitely worth something. His dedication alone is refreshing. (JHA)

\$2.00, Ben White, Young American Comics, threeinverted9s@hotmail.com

Three Men and a Brain

Three banal, self-centered, mono-characteristic men ruled by an alien being that is a giant disembodied brain: you could place these characters in a frat house, change their hair and clothes, and keep the brain and you've got essentially the same plot. Do we really need more examples of male assholiness in our world? I think not. Also, why would a superior being from another planet be interested in hanging out with these guys? Perhaps there is a special subset of dude that this works for, but it ain't me. (JD)

\$1.00, Mark Plaid, Ghoul Stomper, PO Box 8793 Toledo, OH 43623, ghoulstomper@yahoo.com.

Tiny Transportation: Unresolved Ideas and Scrawlings

A fair amount of care went into printing this minute sketchbook—12 of its 24 small, squarish pages are even in glossy color. Most of the material holds up without the support of context. Much of it attempts, and at times attains, a sort of enigmatic poetry. "I rid the world of evil and

eat my meals alone," reads one page. On another, above a drawing of the inner ear: "The quietest sound ever is that which follows the sound of gravel shifting beneath a reversing car tire." The more obviously humorous inclusions are kind of a mixed bag. One page shows a Lufthansa logo and the caption, "You can't pronounce our name, but we have nice cheese sandwiches," which doesn't quite seem clever enough to warrant publication. A lovingly designed trifle, this is a nice buy for Hornschemeier fans, but not substantial enough to recommend to the uninitiated. (CB)

\$6, Paul Hornschemeier, Holy Consumption, 2324 W Walton #3F, Chicago, IL 60622, www.theholysconsumption.com

Waterwise

This sweet, sad, and sentimental book reaches a depth of beauty in the subtlety and flow of the story and the artwork that few others seem to. The artist blends rich surrealist imagery with an equally deep textual content, capturing that loss of innocence that comes with growing up. (JD)

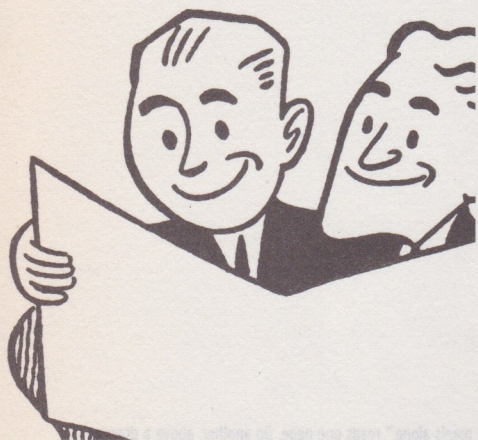
\$14.95, Joel Orff, Alternative Comics, 503 NW 37th Ave Gainesville, FL 32609-2204, 352-373-6336 jmason@indyworld.com www.indyworld.com/altcomics ISBN 1-891867-82-2

Worn Tuff Elbow #1

Marc Bell's crazed world will finally see the market it deserves with Fantagraphics' new series, but unfortunately the edginess and wonky charm of his self-published work has been shone right out of the glossy 8"x10" book. I mean, sure: the nonsensical (or are they Canadian?) throw-away jokes are still there, and the bizarre menagerie of characters (several wild baloneys, a tooth or two, and the extremely evil Monsieur Moustache, who awakes each day to proclaim: "I am awake! I am French! I am rich!"), but there's a forced artiness to the layout that blunts the overall. It's disappointing, but not surprising, that a good scrubbing up will dull a sharp edge. (AEM)

\$4.95, Marc Bell, Fantagraphics, www.fantagraphics.com

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zines

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Abbie Amadio (AJA), Amy Adoyzie (AA), Joe Biel (JB), Ari Charney (AC), Vincent Chung (VC), Lisa Groshong (LG), Dan Laidman (DAL), Anne Elizabeth Moore (AEM), Brian Moss (BM), Claire Sewell (CS)

Apathetic Mass #1

Clichéd first zine attempt per usual. Cover photo of a Viet Cong prisoner being executed at close range to show the brutality of war? Check. Introduction detailing how surprisingly laborious zine production is? Check. Same old rants for revolutions and band interviews as filler? Check. Nothing too interesting and a 10-minute read? Double check. (AA)

\$1, 15358 Midcrest Dr., Whittier, CA 90604, apatheticmass@yahoo.com

Avril LaZine

It's difficult to sort out if several middle-school-aged kids got together to create a slam book on Avril Lavigne, or if someone with a driver's license was somehow involved, but this collection of musings on the teen pop star is clever like a wicked-funny sixth-grade girl. Readers are invited to rank Avril according to the scale 9, 2, 8, and 3 and mail to Canada, where Avril Lavigne lives, or they can respond to a quote of Avril's—although readers are reminded that to score well, they “must provide historical references.” Cute and a bit biting, *Avril LaZine* is a precise critique of everyone's second-favorite pop idol. (AEM)

No price or contact information given

Blurt #2

Lew Houston tells us all about his college love interests in small town Pennsylvania. Every sentence filling these 88 pages is laden with depth and meaning, creating a strange parallel to the measure and tunnel vision world view of Lifter Puller songs. To me that makes Lew a genuine genius capable of explaining something intangible as love and the way people behave in love. I related, grit my teeth and suffered with him throughout. Read this if you've ever been in a relationship. (JB)

\$2, 135 Wapwallopen Rd., Wescospeck, PA 18635

Burn Collector #13

Like many writers, Burian seems to need anti-depressants desperately. *Burn Collector* has some great lines and cool drawings buried in heaps of

self-indulgent blathering. Morosely wandering Italy and Germany, Burian notes: “If you're going to feel sorry for yourself at least find some better weather for it.” (LG)

No price given, Al Burian, 307 Blue Ridge Road, Carrboro NC 27510

Charged Hair, Distorted Riffs, Bullet Belts & Circle Pits #2.5

This is a collection of Jeff's flyers for Vancouver punk shows from 1997 onward. They're both visually striking and funny (his style is wordy as opposed to stark), and his explanations of what happened at the shows are great. A wonderful document of seven years in the life of a scene. (DAL)

\$2 or a mixtape, PO Box 21530, 1424 Commercial Dr., Vancouver, BC, V5L-5G2, Canada

Chickenshit Soup For The Souless #5

Chrix Morix pens heartfelt anecdotes from his youth, his travels and his friends. He makes great stories out of seemingly nothing, yet manages to ramble on about the smallest details. Topped with a fantastic Mike Watt interview, it makes for a fantastic personal zine. (VC)

\$1, 829 Main St., Saskatoon, SK S7H 0K2, Canada, www.ohnotherobot.com

Citizine #7

With in-depth interviews with Kira Roessler (Black Flag), John Denny (Weirdos) and Joey Shithead (DOA), nothing can go wrong. While not on the edge of the underground—the rest focuses on the independent mainstream, mainstream independents or politics—they offer significant and intelligent insight on punk's history. (VC)

\$3.25, 2513 West 4th St., Los Angeles, CA 90057, www.citizinemag.com

Comics Interpreter, The #3

Thankfully, *The Comics Journal* can no longer claim to be sole purveyor of serious comics analysis. Much of this issue relates to the 2004 election, including protest comics and an interview with David Rees. The issue's highlight, however, is a lengthy, investigative back story on how *Big Numbers*, Alan Moore's unrealized masterpiece, ultimately fell apart. (AC)

\$4.95, <http://tci.homestead.com>

Culture Bomb #1

Brian, 16, fights boredom by doing what every teenage punk does: write a zine. We get a lot of these, and they're typically god-awful. Fortunately for Brian, he's a funny guy and has the smarts to interview Chris Bickel. Amusing anecdotes and political ranting fill out this great debut. (VC)

jebuslovesme555@yahoo.com

Dagger #35

We're among friends here, right? So, can we be honest about newsprint interview zines? Don't they tend to be trite and overdone? Like, I already know how this band got their name or the origin of that band. That's what I thought when I stumbled upon *Dagger*, I was slapped in the face for being such a judgmental bitch when the first interview, with the newly reunited Mission Of Burma, was insightful and genuinely interesting. That's followed with a Wayne Kramer interview that's more about the socio-political state of our nation than it is about music. At one point Kramer asks the interviewer, “Is there a couple of music things you wanted to ask about?” Also included are Dag Nasty, The Adolescents, The Baskervilles, Eleni Mandell and reviews galore. (AA)

\$2, PO Box 820102, Portland, OR 97282-1102, www.indiepages.com/dagger

Daybreak News, #5

Daybreak News discusses anarchist issues and causes in an even-tempered way that is neither alienating nor melodramatic. Likewise strong was the article on gentrification and the “Police Beat” column, which gave accounts of recent police brutality/idiocy cases in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area—incidents that seem to keep growing and growing, never receiving the deserved criticism and outrage. (AJA)

Free, PO Box 14007, Minneapolis, MN 55407, daybreak@tao.ca



Don't Blame Me: I Worked For Dean

Boring layout and, surprisingly, as boring of a recount of campaigning for Howard Dean this past Democratic primary. Written in journal style, *Don't Blame Me* shows the writer's love and devotion to politics, especially for her candidate, which is admirable. However, the accounts of campaigning aren't terribly interesting, and the writer pushes too much. (A-)

\$1. c/o O.M. Jammy, PO Box 440422, Somerville, MA 02144

East Village Inky, The #25

This fun-filled issue is jam-packed with Ayun's tales of shuffling her kids between the RNC protests in NYC last year. It's a unique account, and I really loved all of her observations of the scene and the people she passes on her way. This is a great issue and highly recommended. (CS)

\$2. Ayun Halliday, PO Box 22754, Brooklyn, NY 11202, www.ayunhalliday.com

Fear Why The Mouse Can't Breathe #7

This zine revolves around the writer's state of malaise and inability to connect with others. Unfortunately, stories that might otherwise prove compelling are undermined by a deliberately overwrought and stilted writing style. It would be interesting to see this writer's talent channeled toward a more conventional narrative style. (AC)

No price given, 5258 Five Fingers Way, Columbia, MD 21045

Fifth Estate #367

This anarchist zine is more personal and literary than others I've seen. There are a variety of articles, all seemingly chosen with equal importance. Standouts: Marx and Thoreau as they relate to the economy, a his-

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the zines (or magazines) we receive, as long as they are released independently. However, despite our best efforts, not every zine ends up in here for a myriad of reasons. Records marked with a little eye (👁) are designated as "highlight" reviews by the reviewer. That means it's a zine that really stands out for them this time around, but just because a review doesn't have an eye doesn't mean it isn't good. Finally, if a reviewer doesn't like your zine, it's just one person's opinion, so don't freak out. We're sure you put a good deal of work into your project and that alone is worth some congratulations!

torical critique of Nietzsche and his relation to anarchism and one man's story of being arrested during the RNC. (CS)

\$3. P.O. Box 201016, Ferndale, MI 48220, www.fifthstate.org

Flowers From The Grave #2

The second issue finds Walt a bit down and out as things change for him. He gets transferred to a new prison after being in solitary for many years, but he hasn't lost his trademark poetic and wistful yet radical voice. Walt is a rabble rouser in the truest sense of the word. (CS)

\$2/trade/free to prisoners, Fanorama Society, 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02095,
www.fanorama.tk

Fuck & Fight

Is anybody interested in reading about teenage boys stealing bikes, drinking beer, and trying to get laid? Me neither. (LG)

\$1. R. Lee, PO Box 1421, Oshkosh, WI 54903

Future Belongs To Ghosts

A series of ink drawings culled from photos appearing in *Heartattack* zine, issues #1-43. The pain of the emo boys is captured as well as motion and aggression. I never know what to do with zines like this when I'm done with them. (JB)

No price given. Terence Hannun, PO Box 220651, Chicago, IL 60622

 A Girl And Her Bike #9

A beautiful, four-color silkscreen cover adorns this well-packaged zine full of journal-style writings. Angie is queer and quite focused on finding love, and she reflects quite on her day-to-day existence. Some of the writing I found to be too personal to really understand and less appropriate to print, but some people with similar experiences would probably be

excited by this. However, other than the title, you'd never know that this girl owned a bicycle. (JB)

\$3, PO Box 2425, Stn Main Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A7, Canada

Hilt, The #13

A short zine that's dedicated to simple essays on anarchism. There's a history of the Haymarket Riots, an essay on ethical anarchism and an essay about the author's problems with "supporting the troops." (CS)
Free, 101B Cooper St., Westmont, NJ 08108, treehugger029@aol.com

👁 Hitting Rock Bottom Vol 2, #3-5

This sheet of paper has some funny concepts, some of which work better than others, but I'd enjoy running into this guy. Reading all the jobs he quit was refreshingly honest and witty. The books and records he reviews (found in thrift stores and rental cars) made me smile. I didn't care much for the interview with Fuck the Informer though, mostly because it was boring. (18)

Stamp, 505 S 1100 E, Salt Lake City, UT 84102

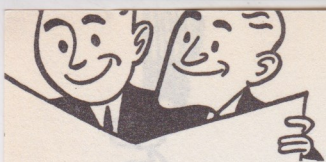
I Do Not Want You To Leave

A series of stories about being an excited child in a new environment told in a voice that held my attention despite my lack of interest in Barbie dolls, penny candy, or her dad's gun collection. The stories were funny, refined, and styled enough to keep me smiling and turning pages. (JB)

No price given, Jacinta Bunnell PO Box 325 Rosendale, NY 12472, www.girlsnotchicks.com

Impact Press #44

Impact's latest issue is primarily dedicated to all things surrounding the menacing prospect of coping with another four years of Bush.



Fortunately, the writers over at *Impact* do far more than simply complain. Heaping with offerings of well-written and detailed pieces, the mag is both subjective and informative, covering the related subjects of abandonment of the country, job out-sourcing, the history of the Republican party and a how-to guide for effectively summoning the winds of change. The issue's bonus features include standardized record reviews, comics and a comprehensive list of the 10 worst animal-abusing companies of 2004. Write on. (BM)

\$2, PMB 361, University Blvd., Orlando FL 32817, www.impactpress.com

Inner Swine Vol. 10, #4

This would be a godsend for those who ponder and reflect on the mundane and have a lot of free time on their hands (eight years ago and counting for me). Jeff tries my patience with the amount of pages he can churn out about the same basic sentiments: holidays are greedy, corporate scams, family is an unpleasant annoyance, and he likes to drink beer. He can write, though, and I'd be excited to see issues with more depth. (JB)

\$2, PO Box 3024 Hoboken, NJ 07030

Jerk Magazine, Vol. III, Issue 3

A really nice student publication out of Syracuse, N.Y., that's relevant even outside the university. There's a good variety of articles here, ranging from thoughts on stem-cell research to real-life ghost hunters and homelessness in Syracuse. It's rounded out by some great photography. Recommended. (CS)

\$2, 126 Schine Student Center, Syracuse, NY 13244, jerkmag@hotmail.com

Johnny America #2

This extremely ambitious zine is really more akin to a post-collegiate literary journal with a few typical zine flourishes. The heavy stock paper, the thread binding, and the passage at the end explaining the origin of their font indicate an attention to detail that surpasses most of its self-published peers. The main work of fiction is a bizarre series of sketches about the narrator's sister: She takes a Persian boyfriend during the height of the Iran hostage crisis and later develops an obsession with raising chickens. It may sound contrived, but it's definitely entertaining. Another writer pens a mock letter to his slain Dungeons & Dragons character ("a puny little gnome with a negative three dexterity rating") apologizing for his demise. The editors have sprinkled a number of unconventional reviews throughout the zine, including a detailed review of the Hillcrest Elementary School cafeteria. The two reviews undertaking a serious analysis of two newspaper comic strips may be taking ironic deconstruction too far, but then who doesn't enjoy seeing a sober listing of Dennis the Menace's main characteristics: "overall-wearing, slingshot-wielding, nuisance-making." (AC)

\$3, PO Box 44-2001, Lawrence, KS 66044, www.johnnyamerica.net

Junk Drawer #2

Junk Drawer pairs interesting visuals with writing that is, at best, incoherent nonsense. The redeeming qualities of the zine are its drawings and copied collections of random junk like old photo processing envelopes and shredded photographs. (LG)

Free/send postage, Tom Waltzman, 1912 Dufferin St., Philadelphia PA 19145

Kankazine, November 2004

Three academics showcase generally lackluster short fiction, but the real treat is a contest held for children (ages 6-12) on making political collages. And boy, what results! I'm skeptical of its authenticity, but it's very funny nonetheless. (VC)

No price given, C. Shoup, 448 1/2 N. Prairie Ave., Bradley, IL 60915, cashoup@juno.com

Kimosabe #2

A lo-fi blog in which the author has make-up sex with his girlfriend, smokes some pot and chronicles the various movies he watches. Apparently the concept was to fill up a notepad in order to make the issue. Never my favorite concept for a zine, but what you see is what you get. (CS)

\$1 or stamps, Marc Parker, 2000 NE 42 Ave. #221, Portland, OR 97213

LA Scene Reporter, The #13

Nothing too amazing here. It's the "Best of LA 2004" issue, and if you like Top-10 and Best-Five lists by people you haven't the slightest clue about, then track this down. It appears to be free, after all, which isn't so bad. (CS)

Free, www.freewebs.com/itsallgravyzine

Lazybones #3

This diary-style zine covers worn-out material in the form of the endless search for yet another shit job, yet it's so well-written and engaging that it's actually entertaining. (LG)

\$1, Marc Parker, 2000 NE 42 Ave #221, Portland, OR 97213

Learning Project Coloring Book, The #1

Dust off that box of colored wax, kiddies! Pick out all the crimson-hued crayons, and get ready for bloodshed cause it's get-happy-fun-time on "Militia Movements and Guerilla Warfare." These 32 pages are brilliantly assembled to give you chills and giggles as they pan across the globe for line drawings of 18 militias and guerilla groups, ranging from New England's Minutemen to Angola's Unita. The three artists, Bwana Spoons, Kyoshi Nakazawa, and Maja D'Aoust, have created a who's who of the colonized, terrorist, haters and playas. It's smart, informative and even rhymes at times. How do you not stamp this a work of genius: "Color him Khmer Rouge to make you blush. Pol Pot turned back time to zero, and declared him a hero?" They sum it up perfectly with "The Learning Project is fun for the whole cell." (AA)

\$5, PO Box 6645, Portland, OR 97228

Loudmouth #7

I was really impressed by this publication's inclusiveness. This is the family issue, and all sorts of issues are covered by lots of different people. The opening essay, "The Sitcom Family and the All-American Family," is an easy-to-read, succinct analysis of the problematic aspects of sitcoms when it comes to race, gender and class. Then there are several pieces by different women on their different experiences with motherhood. An interview with Gay Shame creator, Matt Bernstein, is perhaps a bit out of place in this issue, but is nonetheless a great, inspiring and eye-opening read. Other pieces on transracial adoption, Chicano families and a critique of global sisterhood, among others, round out this great issue. *Loudmouth* covers a lot of ground, and I look forward to seeing future issues. (CS)

Free/send postage, University-Student Union, 5154 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032, loudmouthzine@wildmail.com

Max Levine Ensemble Choose Your Own Adventure Story, The

This booklet is in the mold of the books that were so big when we were kids—and for good reason. They were awesome, and they do a good job of capturing the spirit here as you opt whether to go on tour with the band, run from the police, have a drink, etc. (DAL)

No price given, 830 W. Seventh St., Bloomington, IN 47404, thespoonboy@hotmail.com

Modern Arizona #7

Joe Unseen regales us with tales of political intrigue as he visits/protests both the RNC and DNC. Stories of berating and being berated, of insipid post-9/11 policies and beer drinkin'. There's also an epilogue, dated 11/3/04, a day of mourning for many, but Joe figured that life went on and went to a bar. (AA)

\$1 or trade, PO Box 494, Brewster, NY 10509, unseen@bestweb.net

Modern Robot Illustrated #1

The wrathful robot depicted on the cover destroying a city skyline belies the helpful robots illustrated within, which clearly desire nothing more than "to serve the humans." Doug Belan promises that readers will go "absolutely kooky-zany for robotics," and it's hard to disagree when surveying his charmingly rendered creations. Aesthetically, the robots bear a strong stylistic resemblance to those featured on *Futurama*. Nearly all of them dispense with their duties with maniacally toothy robotic grins, whether poised to pick their owner's nose

(Cyber-Pick) or wipe their owner's ass (Cyber-Wipe). The text accompanying the latter robot is actually funnier than the robot itself, as Belan introduces its wiping, bidet spritzing, and talc-dusting abilities by asking: "Isn't it degrading that we humans are expected to wipe our own 'messes' off?" Indeed, nearly all of Belan's robots are designed to address the most trivial needs of their human masters: folding brown paper grocery bags and dialing 1-800 numbers, among others. The Fork-Borg, however, solves a problem that has the potential to uplift the masses: It will "unobtrusively" feed you your dinner, so that you don't have to miss precious seconds of television when filling your fork and guiding it to your mouth. (AC)

\$1 plus stamps or trade, 707 E. Wright St., Milwaukee, WI 53212, iliketodrawpictures@hotmail.com

Murder Can Be Fun #19

Murder is well written and designed, copiously researched and perversely fascinating. Issue 19 features "Musical Mayhem," with a lengthy and gruesome cover story about Western swing star Spade Cooley's gruesome attack on his wife. Equally compelling pieces include deaths involving David Cassidy, jazz trombonist Frank Rosolino and The Band. (LG)

\$2, John Marr, PO Box 640111, San Francisco, CA 94164, johnmarr1@yahoo.com

Nero Fiddled While Rome Burned #7

Nero jams text- and photo-collage on every page, resulting in a Bush/war-themed rant-fest that's nearly impossible to decipher. Several pages of political tirades—in verse—make me suspect the author is a kooky old man holed up with 37 cats, a decade of newspapers and a rhyming dictionary. (LG)

\$1, Jacob David, PO Box 3050, Eureka CA 95502

Nero Fiddled While Rome Burned #8

Wow, it's hard to believe that Jacob is still at this. I guess he's got four more years to crank out his crazy zine now. And you know the drill on this one: diatribe after scathing diatribe on the foibles and pitfalls of the Bush administration and the US government. His sarcasm still manages to amuse, though. (CS)

\$1, Jacob David, PO Box 3050, Eureka, CA 95502

Off-Line #32

Well done again! Claire takes a look back into the black hole of our youths, the "junior high" years, while Vincent talks shit about peace activists. These thoughtful essays are accompanied by more delicious vegan recipes and their glorious "Readers' Forum," which is home to very healthy zine dialoguing. Go Off-Line! (AA)

Free/send postage, 35 Barker Ave., #46, White Plains, NY 10601

One Foot In The Grave, Spring 2005

How often do you find yourself thinking, "I'm too old for this"? Never again! OFITG interviews folks over 30 years old about their commitment to those naïve ideals that many are quick to deem as just a phase. Get introspective with scene elders: Rod Coronado, Sahee Kil, Mullarkey and Kathy Wooldridge. (AA)

\$2, 950 N Richey Blvd., Tucson, AZ 85716

Passing Water

Typos and clichés abound in this slim collection of short stories featuring telemarketing jobs and urine samples. In the strongest one, a woman reluctantly picks up her deadbeat husband, who says he won the lottery. (LG)

Free/send postage, Texty, 105 Char Oak Drive, Columbia, SC 29212

Pea

Although her spelling is atrocious, this writer has crafted some memorable anecdotes. During drunken bashes in the woods, one friend attempts to simulate flight by framing her eyes with her hands and dashing about in a madcap fashion. In another piece, she mocks the danger her "spastic elbows" present while obsessively learning to master Mario Kart. (AC)

50 cents plus stamps, 702 W. Burlington Ave., Fairfield, IA 52556

Philadelphia Independent #20

This issue, published in November, contains the usual post-election wall-

ing, though with more intelligence than most. Beyond that are strong arts and local culture pieces that make Philadelphia seem like a liberal, hipster utopia for people who like coffee, books, bikes and who can afford \$75 haircuts. (LG)

\$2, 1-26 Arch St., Philadelphia PA 19107, www.philadelphiaindependent.net

Please Kill Yourself #10

Zinester Jay Debauchery is a genuinely funny writer, as his laugh-out-loud review of the new Björk album demonstrates (he goes into "erotic overload"). He has a solid interview with a guy from Flogging Molly that's mostly about booze, and some other folks contribute some pieces that read like filler. (DAL)

No price given, 630 E. 14th St., Houston, TX 77008, pkymag@hotmail.com

Please Kill Yourself #11

This is a very "punk" (e.g. unapologetically offensive) includes a "the worst bands in Texas" feature, insulting record reviews, gross photos, and more. I rolled my eyes, not because I was offended, but because I had seen it so many times before and still had no use for it. (JB)

\$1, 630 E 14th St. Houston, TX 77008

Profane Existence #46

I'm still shocked by the new pristine aesthetic, but this is Punk Planet, so... this thick-ass book is chock-full of music, politics, and art coverage. Interviews on Witch Hunt, Wolfbrigade (RIP) the Profits, and CLIT Fest coverage make a solid issue. Despite its density, PE never relies on overbearing filler. (VC)

\$5, PO Box 8722, Minneapolis, MN 55408, www.profanexistence.com

Rancid News, #8

This hefty UK zine pulls out all the stops: columns, interviews, reviews, etc. Most notable were the article exposing, or rather damning, PunkVoter as a tool of the Democratic Party, a first-person account and analysis of the Seattle WTO protests way back when (1999) and an interview with Q And Not U. (AJA)

91, Rancid News, PO Box 382, 456 The Strand, WC2R 0D2, UK

Ⓢ Razorburn #3

Oh man, this is such a satisfying read. DIY cut-and-pasted photocopied zines are never this good. The issue includes revealing interviews with Ron Jeremy, Al Franken, Aaron Lange (Garbage Pail Kids) and Brinke Stevens (B-movie scream queen). The dissection of popular cult television shows and limericks on historical revolutionaries were fantastic as well. All the content is linked with sardonic comics that viciously critique as much as they amuse. All of it is put together with wit, humor, and a sharp grasp on underground pop culture. It's obvious that the folks behind this are just a bunch of nerdy fanboys with a huge appreciation for the "weird stuff" or hyper-cultured hipsters digging for the new underground. The only real difference between the two is how much they get laid. (VC)

\$2, 2335 East Ave., Columbus, OH 43202

Razorcake #23

Razorcake offers the typical punk zine format. One highlight: A columnist lists his top 100 Ramones songs as they relate to his penis. An old interview with Nirvana turns comical when the band gets irritated by the interviewer's relentlessly geeky line of questioning. (AC)

\$3, PO Box 42129, Los Angeles, CA 90042, www.razorcake.com

Rise And The Fall, The #2

Ah, the two cousins that used to finger each other back in the day: punk rock and skateboarding. They spare no time getting deep in stories of folks buckling down and living the DIY dreams that inspire most of us punks: kids building skateparks, Dogtown, and Jesse Townley's political career. (VC)

Free/send money for postage, PO Box 1794, San Pedro, CA 90733, www.theriseandthefall.com

Ⓢ Rise And The Fall, The #3

This San Pedro zine is an incredible local resource that's fun to read even if you're thousands of miles away (or, for that matter, if you

live on the other side of LA, which can still seem that far away). They seamlessly blend the past and the present, reminiscing about punk shows from 1982 and giving the latest updates on a neighborhood skate park. My favorite part is "El Beardo's Corner" which juxtaposes beautiful black-and-white photographs with the latest lowdown on what's going on around Pedro, including an account of a show that ends with this gem: "One of the best experiences I've ever had in a beat-up living room after midnight." The Red Onions interview is notable for having an introduction that is laudatory while noting that the band "sounded like shit" during a recent show. That's honest journalism. This issue also features part two of a Mike Brinson interview and chats with Rolling Blackouts, Vadge Moore, and Big Bob Clark of Aggression. And because it's Pedro, of course there's an interview with Mike Watt, the local legend. No matter how many times he gets spotlighted Watt will never be overexposed, the man is just too much of a workhorse, constantly unveiling some new brilliant project. (DAL)

No price given, PO Box 1794, San Pedro, CA 90733, www.theriseandthefall.com

Ruminator, November/December 2004

The highlights of this outstanding periodical are an essay by Harvey Pekar (*American Splendor* author) and an interview with Negativland's Mark Hosler. Cultural criticism ensues with video games, Chris Ware, Nick Cave, and others. Our illiterate readers should note that this periodical is high on literary arts coverage and content. (VC)

\$3.95, 452 Selby Ave., Second Floor West, St. Paul, MN 55102

Sample, Fall 2004 Edition

Too many local music zines hide their civic pride under Modest Mouse interviews, so it's refreshing to find one that keeps it 100 percent local. Let's hope Dallas/Fort Worth can sustain such a resource. With Jack Ingram and the Beat Up Ford Band, Rahim the Band and Salim Nourallah. (VC)

\$2.50, PO Box 471159, Ft. Worth, TX 76147, www.samplepress.com

Seven Eleven #15

The narrator describes his spotty employment history, having flit among 15 menial jobs since high school. But, a well-rendered comic makes this zine truly worth seeking out: a fellow coffeeshop employee, quiet and nebbishy, mistakes the narrator's offhand remark as evidence of a shared obsession with the '80s sitcom *Bosom Buddies*. (AC)

\$1, PO Box 771402, Lakewood, OH 44107

Slug Mag #191

Some of the worst "journalism" found under the sun, this mag has continued to be a waste of my time. Interviewers without tape recorders, predominantly filled with advertising and a completely elitist vibe. If you are going to interview interesting people, do your homework and ask interesting questions. (JB)

351 Pierpont Ave Ste 4B Salt Lake City, UT 84101, www.slugmag.com

Slug #192

Free zines are free for a couple reasons, mostly advertising revenue. This one isn't much of an exception. The only thing that I really came away with is that Salt Lake City seems to be very vegan friendly because there seems to be a healthy population of vegan delis, shoe stores, and bondage boutiques. (AA)

Free/send postage, 351 Pierpont Ave., Ste. 4B, Salt Lake City, UT 84101

Ⓢ Slug And Lettuce, #18

Starting out melancholic in its opening column, this issue of *Slug And Lettuce* keeps in tow with that same mood. Most of the columns this time around deal with weightier topics: the rapes at Philadelphia's Pointless Fest, teen abortion and motherhood, all intelligently delivered and disconcerting. On a happier note, along with the usual book, zine and music reviews, a two-page photo collage of various bands put together by Christine is at the zine's center. (AJA)

60 cents postage, *Slug & Lettuce*, PO Box 26632, Richmond, VA 23261-6632

Stay Free! #23

Stay Free's cultural criticism has shifted to more New York-centric content. Chuck E. Cheese's arrival in Brooklyn prompts a fascinating company overview that will sadden nostalgists. An interview with two former flavor factory employees will horrify fans of natural smoke flavor and butter lover's popcorn. (AC)

\$3.95, 390 Butler St., Third Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11217, www.stayfreemagazine.org

Take On Your Heroes, #5

This issue includes interviews with No Idea Records, the Muffs, and Knife Fight, among others. Impressive for a one-man operation, the zine has intelligent and well-researched interviews. Also included are a handful of reviews from similar bands. (AJA)

Free, PO Box 98395, Atlanta, GA 30359, www.stompandswagger.com/toyh

Truckstop

This potentially awesome zine detailing Alan Hawort's career as a truck driver gets muddled in disjointed writing and lack of insight. But if you want to read about hauling an 18-wheeler across the country with all of its trials and tribulations, you may find yourself liking it more than I did. (AA)

No price given, Stanky Groove Press, 26 Alma Ave., Belmont, MA 02478, www.stanky-groove.com

Vegetalist Comments #1

Although the small handful of young'uns that make up the punk community in suburban Pine Bush, NY, may enjoy looking at poorly Xeroxed photos of themselves getting crucial in the pit, I highly doubt anyone else will take any interest in these text-less pages. (BM)

\$1, c/o Marisa Rowe, 1226 Burlingham Rd., Pine Bush, NY 12566, beatlebooper@yahoo.com

Verbicide #12

Verbicide wraps a glossy cover around 64 pages of small- and very-small type containing captivating interviews, clear design, and graphics and a nice photo essay. Unfortunately, it also contains some of the worst poetry and fiction I've ever read, making it read, at times, like an act of literary violence. (LG)

\$3.95, www.scissorpress.com

We Have The Deathray!

This zine opens with a Midwestern travelogue wherein the narrator admits that he regularly sought guidance in his Greyhound misadventures by wondering "What would Cometbus do?" however, rarely yields any answers to his quandary. Unfortunately, a Chuck Norris tour diary is marred by pages that are out of sequence. (AC)

No price given, PO Box 21530, 1424 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC V5L 5G2, Canada

Ⓢ Working Stiff Review #2

This issue of *Working Stiff Review* focuses on education and its relation to a future of working shitty jobs. There's an interview with John Taylor Gatto, a former NY teacher of the year, who got fed up with the education system and quit, publishing his resignation in the *Wall Street Journal*. The information in most of the comics and articles is pretty basic, though still interesting and incisive. The recurring theme is to succeed one must conform and follow the rules. True or not, I don't need it beaten into me. (JB)

\$5, PO Box 2273 Ames, IA 50010

Xenophobia #1

When I was in high school, I put out a zine, every aspect of which was painstakingly horrendous. That being said, I'll lend some sympathy and restraint to this particular group of hormonal freshmen that spotlight their love of Blink-182, various local ska-punk bands, and Rage Against The Machine. (BM)

No contact information provided

Send your zines to: Punk Planet 4229 N. Honore Chicago IL 60613.

po box 263
yarmouthport ~ ma 02675
info@cheapbuttons.com

melk the g6-49
glossolalia

The bass and drum duo have composed an album that comes off sounding like a Christian Marclay-ed Melvins 12" crossfaded with a Ruins cover of *Music for Airports*
Inr-03

receptor sight
cycles and connections

If you enter one hypnagogic state of bodiless illumination this year, it should be Receptor Sight's new album *Cycles and Connections*! The energy which permeates the universe will flow from your speakers. Inr-05

gogglesphere
babies in hell

For anyone who's too mature for 80's cock rock, fed up with death metal, and is unable to dance or have sex while Don Caballero is blasting on the stereo---this album is a must have. **inr-04**

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indianapolis, IN 46220
joyfulnoiserecordings.com

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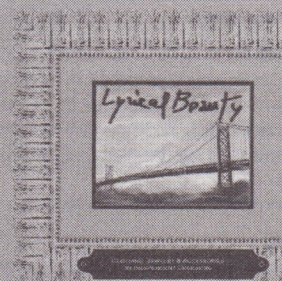
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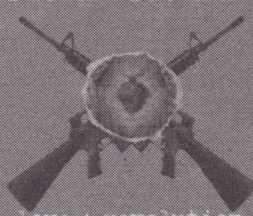
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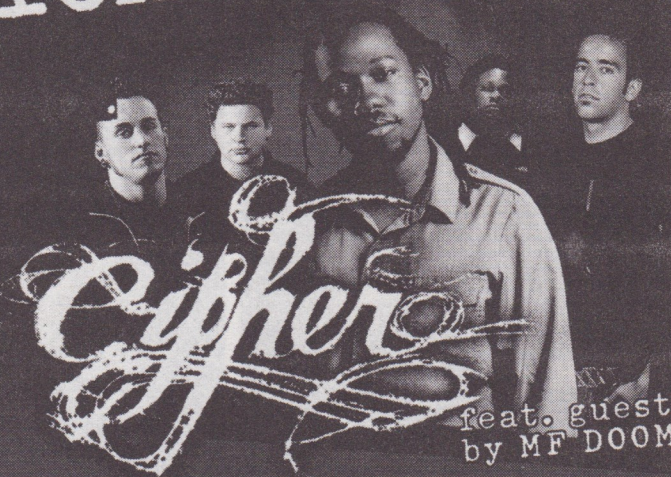
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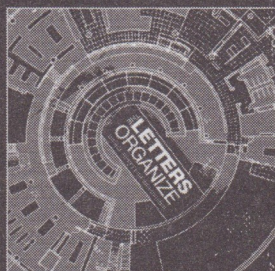
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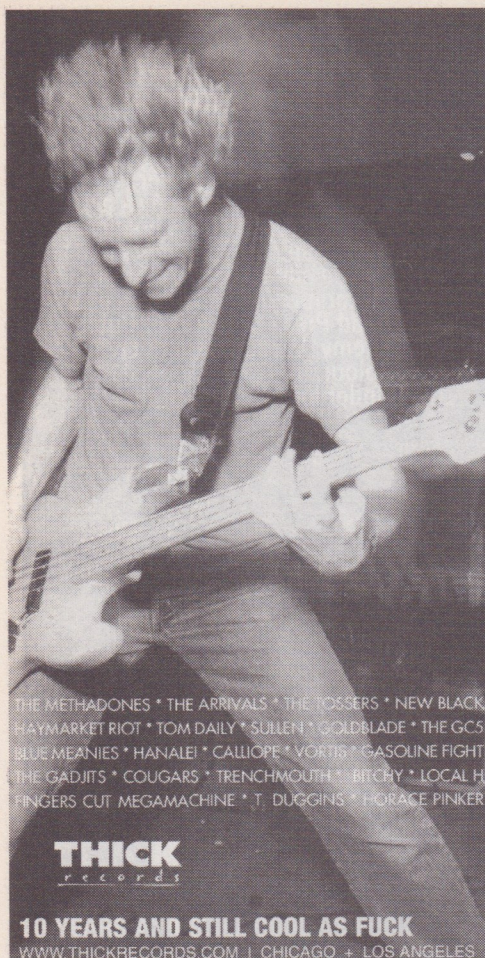
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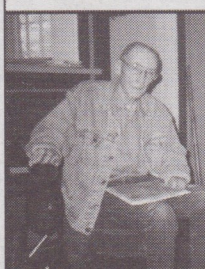


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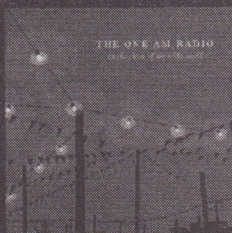
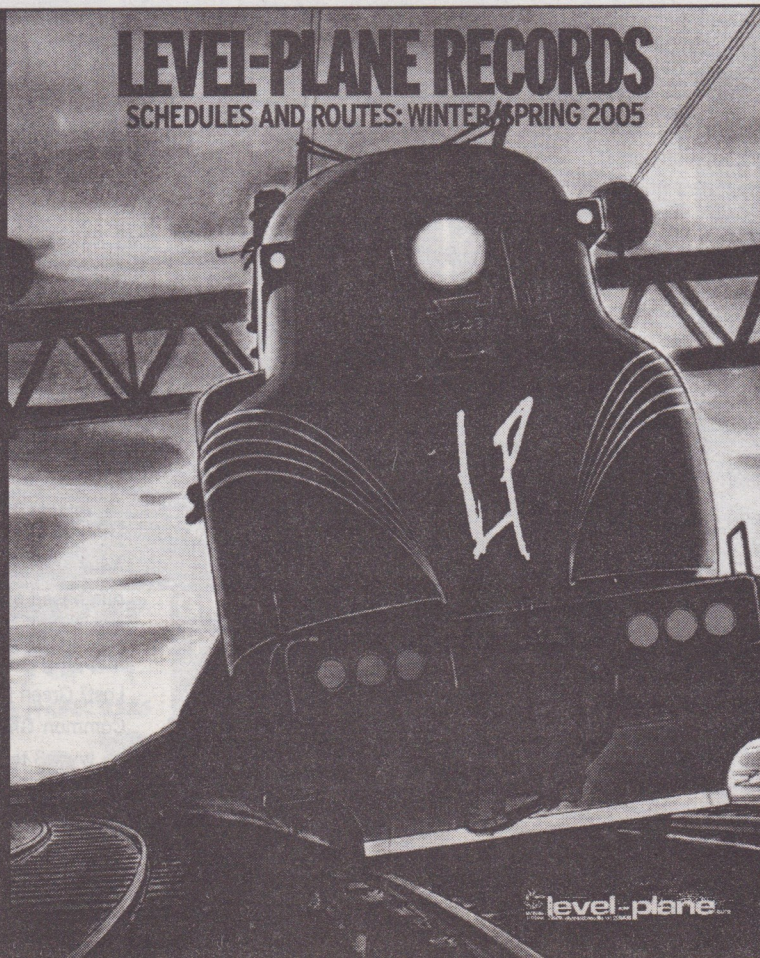
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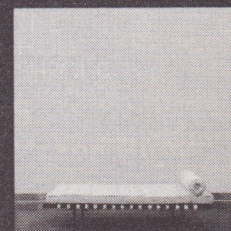
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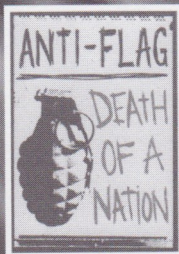
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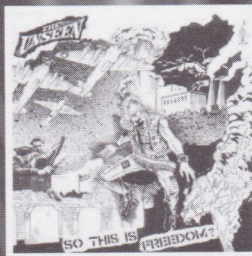
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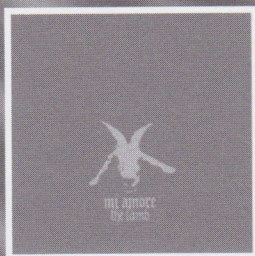
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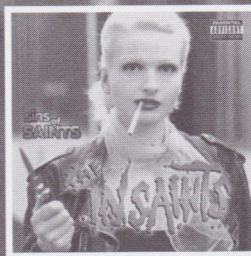
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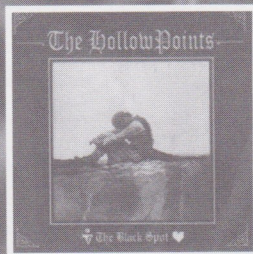
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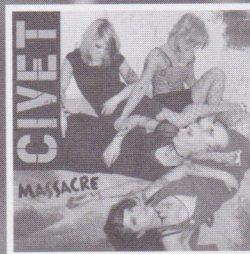
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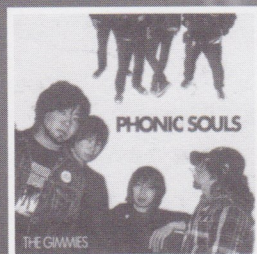
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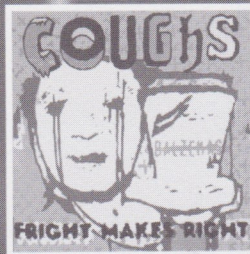
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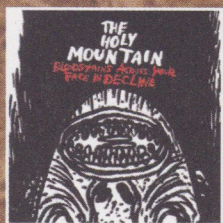


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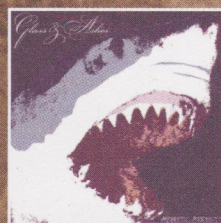
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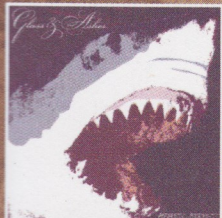


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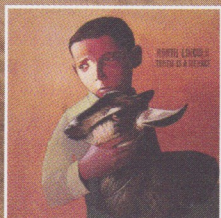
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